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INDO-ARAB

# INDO-ARAB RELATIONS

MAQBUL AHMAD

INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

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INDO-ARAB RELATIONS is a survey of India's relations with the Arab world from ancient up to modern times from an historical point of view. The author has dealt with the three main aspects of the relations, namely, political, commercial and cultural, and has discussed the nature and character of each, particularly emphasizing the last. His main thesis is that while political and diplomatic relations varied from time to time, commercial and cultural relations continued to grow over the centuries. With the transmission of the scientific and artistic achievements, the religious and philosophical thought and the social and cultural values of the Indians to the Arabs and vice versa, the two peoples not only benefited from each other in the Middle Ages but also learned to love and respect each other. The Indian share in the progress of the mediaeval Islamic or Arab society was as great and important as that of the Arabs in the advancement of the mediaeval Indian society, and in no other period of their history, except in recent years, have the two peoples been closer to each other than during the Middle Ages. Though the work has an historical bias, the conclusions drawn from the history of Indo-Arab relations in the past, are of utmost importance for a student of international relations. Today, the Arabs and the Indians have embarked on a new path, that of economic self-sufficiency and prosperity, socio-religious reforms and struggle for world peace, and to co-operate successfully with each other to achieve these objectives, it is essential to know how the two peoples have behaved towards each other in the past, so that their present bonds may be further strengthened.



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## INDO-ARAB RELATIONS



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*An Account of India's Relations with the Arab  
World from Ancient up to Modern times*

MAQBUL AHMAD

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INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS  
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*Dedicated to the memory of*  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU



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## PREFACE

THE STUDY of India's political, cultural and commercial relations with the Arabs in the past is an academic task that has long been overdue. Indeed, pioneering works on some aspects of the relations, like Dr. Tara Chand's *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* and Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi's '*Arab-o-Hind Ke Ta'alluqat*', have been produced. While the former deals mainly with the impact of Islam on India, the latter confines the survey to the early mediaeval period. While strictly in the tradition of the above two works, the present study carries the subject a little further and brings the survey down to the end of the 19th century. The subject is treated from a conceptual rather than from a chronological angle. An effort has been made to study the nature and the intensity of the mutual impact of the two civilizations, namely, the Arab and the Indian, through the ages. The processes whereby two nations influence one another socially and culturally are often imperceptible. So silent are they in their action and reaction that it becomes difficult and at times impossible for a historian to distinguish one from the other, or to differentiate between the indigenous characteristics of a nation's culture and the foreign influences imbibed by it. In any study of this nature one is confronted with several intricate questions and the mere availability of the data does not help solve the problem. This is more so in the case of the present study, for the Arabs and the Indians have been acquainted with each other from times immemorial, and have lived along the shores of the same sea, namely, the Arabian, which led to a considerable amount of cultural and commercial exchange.



The present study reveals that the ancient civilizations of West Asia had a profitable trade with ancient India and possibly some diplomatic relations too. In the later centuries, along with commerce and trade, diplomatic contacts seem to have been established directly between India and some of these countries. But from the seventh century onwards one finds that the relations became more intimate. The succeeding period of nearly five centuries or so was the most fruitful period in Indo-Arab relations, when sciences and arts of one were transmitted most liberally to the other through translations, and there was a great exchange of religious and philosophical thought. Each influenced the social and cultural life of the other. The Indian share in the social and intellectual advancement of the Arabs was by no means insignificant during this period; in the same way, the Arab or Islamic knowledge, religion, and social and cultural ideas permeated the life of the Indian people and influenced their culture. It is for this reason that I have designated this period as the Golden Period of Cultural Exchange. The trade and diplomatic activities also became intense during this period, and Arab knowledge of India became very intimate, which is evident from the vast number of Arabic works on India produced during this period. The centuries that followed were marked by a general social and cultural decline both in India and the Arab world. This began from about the twelfth century and lasted till the re-awakening in the 19th century. I have also attempted to analyse the causes of the decline of the Muslim society during this period and have pointed out that the most prominent factor was the reorientation of the Muslim educational system in the eleventh century; other factors like the economic conditions, decline in trade and commerce and the political upheavals, no doubt, added to the general decline. Again, it was during this period that the Indo-Arab trade suffered a great set-back because of the emergence of Portugal as a sea-power in the Indian Ocean. However, Indo-Arab social and cultural exchange continued even though diplomatic relations declined. Thus, it was not until the dawn of the modern period that as a result of the re-awakening and the socio-religious reformist movements, intellectual contacts between the Arabs and the Indians were re-established. The present work, therefore, ends with the 19th century, and no attempt has been made to deal with the 20th century. The reason is obvious. The present

century forms a separate subject of study by itself, for both the Arabs and the Indians have witnessed in modern times great political struggles and socio-economic changes of a fundamental nature. The amount of material pertaining to the present period is so vast and the nature of relations so varied that it requires special attention and it would not be possible to do justice to it in the present single volume. I have also added a special chapter to the book, entitled 'Glimpses of Ancient and Medieval India in Arabic Literature', so that the reader may form some idea of the contents of the medieval Arabic literature available on India.

It must be pointed out, however, that the present work neither claims to be comprehensive in scope nor exhaustive in content; it is simply intended to provide a basis for future intensive studies on the subject. Lastly, it is hoped that a study of the past history of Indo-Arab relations as attempted in the present work, will help the peoples of India and the Arab world to understand each other better, and to cement more firmly the good and cordial relations that exist between the two peoples today.

*Aligarh*

*March 1, 1969*

MAQBUL AHMAD

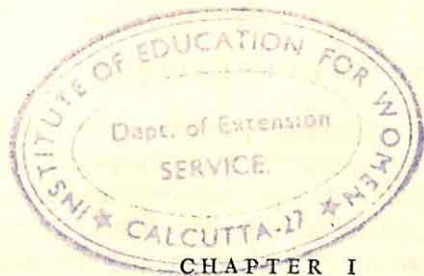
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## ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A.H.I.* = *An Advanced History of India* by R. C. Majumdar and others.  
*A.I.* = *Alberuni's India*.  
*'Aja'ib* = *Kitab 'Aja'ib al-Hind* by Buzurg b. Shahryar.  
*Akhbar* = *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind* by Sulayman.  
*Arab Geographers* = *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India* by Nainar.  
*'Arab-o-Hind* = *'Arab-o-Hind Ke Ta'alluqat* by Nadvi.  
*Dau Jadid* = *Dau Jadid 'ala Ta'rikh al-Hind, Ta'rikh-i Hind par na'i raushni*. See al-'Umari.  
*E.I.* = *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition).  
*H'A.* = *Hudud al-'Alam*.  
*H.M.C. & P.* = *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan* by Ikram.  
*H.O.A.* = *History of the Arabs* by Hitti.  
*I. Khur* = *Ibn Khurradadhbih*.  
*India* = *India and the Neighbouring Territories*. See al-Idrisi.  
*M.I.Q.* = *Mediaeval India Quarterly*.  
*Marvazi* = *Sharaf al-Zaman Tahir Marvazi On China, the Turks and India*.  
*M.M.C.V.* = *Al-Mas'udi Millenary Commemoration Volume*.  
*Muruj* = *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jauhar* by al-Mas'udi.  
*Tanbih* = *Al-Tanbih wa 'l-Ishraf* by al-Mas'udi.  
*Ta'rikh* = *Ta'rikh* by al-Ya'qubi.  
*Travels* = *Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa*.  
*Sifat* = *Biruni's Picture of the World, Sifat al-Ma'mura 'ala al-Biruni*.  
*Voyages* = *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*.





## CHAPTER I

# INDIA'S CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB WORLD

## I. THE ANCIENT PERIOD

It is difficult to ascertain the exact nature and intensity of India's cultural relations with West Asia and North Africa (the regions where Arabic is largely spoken today) in ancient times. Contacts with these regions are known to have existed since the third millenium B.C. Mohenjo-Daro (in Sind) was "probably a great port carrying on trade by sea with Ur and Kish, and perhaps also with Egypt." There was probably overland intercourse also between the Sindhu Valley and western and central Asia.<sup>1</sup> These relations seem to have been of a commercial nature, although some cultural exchange must have resulted in the process.

Commenting upon the relations of ancient Egypt with the outside world of antiquity, M. A. Murray points out, "Even with our present limited knowledge of the ancient world it can be seen that every country bordering on the Mediterranean owes a debt to Egypt; but as knowledge increases it will be found that countries farther afield, such as Russia, Persia, Arabia and perhaps even India and China, were in contact with the greatest civilization of the ancient world."<sup>2</sup>

The same limitations made it difficult to suggest or to discover traces of India's relations, cultural or otherwise, with ancient Egypt or any other civilization of antiquity. Besides, the very nature of the archaeological evidence available so far raises a variety of academic problems and creates controversies, not the least being the differences of opinion among historical geographers with regard to identification of place-names, etc. One such place-name mentioned in ancient Egyptian inscriptions is 'the mysterious Land of Punt' in connection with expeditions sent by Egyptian



Pharaohs\* to the East and especially in connection with the expedition sent by Queen Hatshepsut.\*\* Some Egyptologists have identified 'Punt' with Somaliland,<sup>3</sup> but Murray holds this view: "The type of men of Punt, as depicted by Hatshepsut's artists suggests an Asiatic rather than an African race; and the sweet-smelling woods point to India as the land of their origin."<sup>4</sup> Again, "The cheetah or hunting leopard, which appears to be peculiar to India, is among the products of Punt brought to Hatshepsut".<sup>5</sup> If *Punt* is identical with India, then Queen Hatshepsut's was one of the first commercial-cum-diplomatic expeditions sent to India from Egypt in the ancient period, for the pomp and glory with which the Queen's envoy and his retinue were received by the King of the Land of Punt, Parihu, his wife, his daughter and others, the farewell feasts given, the exchange of unique and precious gifts and treasures which were conveyed in five boats.† all indicate that it was not merely an exploratory or commercial expedition, but that it had a diplomatic mission as well.

The commercial relations that existed between India and the western world must have resulted in some cultural influences also, but these were of a very minor kind. For example, some common folk tales current in India and the West might have been the result of such intercourse. "But the Babylonian origin of the story of the flood in *Satapatha Brahmana* or the influence of Chaldean astronomy and Babylonian weights and measures upon India is more problematical." The allusions to sea-voyages in the *Rigveda* are "vague and uncertain". There are again references to distant voyages in Buddhist literature; sailors going far

\*Expeditions were sent frequently by land or by sea under the sixth dynasty (c.2341-2181)—in the Middle Kingdom (c.2000-1800); in the New Kingdom by Queen Hatshepsut, probably in 1495; Rameses III (1198-67) sent a fleet of large ships from a harbour opposite Coptus to Punt as well as a naval expedition to some copper mines in the Sinai peninsula. (See G. F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, Princeton, 1951, pp. 7-8).

\*\*New Kingdom. She sent her expedition probably in 1495. See G. F. Hourani, Princeton 1951, pp. 7-8.

†One scene represents the Egyptian envoy standing beside a table on which are displayed the beads and other trade articles which he had brought to exchange for native products. He returned to his royal mistress bringing gold, ivory, incense, apes, birds and trees (M. A. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 49).

out to sea and making use of shore-sighting birds.\* On the basis of the archaeological evidence such as the figures of apes, Indian elephants and Bactrian camels on the obelisk of Shalmaneser III (860 B.C.) and the presence of logs of Indian teak found in the Temple of Moon at Mugheir (Ur of the Chaldees) and in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, both belonging to the sixth century B.C., the beginnings of India's relations with West Asia may be pushed back to at least the ninth century B.C.<sup>7</sup>

The rise of the Achaeminid empire, which extended over nearly the whole of Iran, Asia Minor, Syria, Phoenicia and the ancient kingdom of Egypt, broke the political barrier that had existed between India and the rest of the world, and it was not long before the Persian suzerainty was extended to the Sindhu Valley and probably to some territory to the east of that river.<sup>8</sup> In the opinion of Hadi Hasan, the Persians did not love the sea but they loved sea-power and tried "to create a direct communication between the seclusion of Persis and the commerce of the world". Consequently, the Nile canal was constructed and its construction was supplemented by an exploration of the Indian Ocean—from the Gulf of Persia to the delta of the Indus, and thence to the apex of the Erythraean Sea.<sup>9</sup> Darius the Great (521-485 B.C.) appreciated the value of linking Persia with India and Egypt by sea as well as by land and for this purpose organized some notable maritime operations.<sup>10</sup> One of the results of the commercial intercourse between India and the West Asian countries during this period must have been the use and exchange of commercial terminology such as the names of imported and exported goods, etc. Evidence to this effect is not altogether lacking.

According to the Jewish chronicles, during the reign of King Solomon (c. 800 B.C.) a navy equipped by Hiram, King of Tyre,\*\* made a voyage to the east every three years, bringing back with it "gold and silver, ivory, apes, peacocks and great plenty of Almug trees and precious stones". The destination of this expedition was

\*For example, a reference in one Jataka to a commercial voyage to the kingdom of Baveru (identified with Babylon); but the date of the story is not known with certainty (R. C. Majumdar, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 612).

\*\*"Hiram's men built for Solomon his fleet—the first in Hebrew history—based in Ezion-Geber (al-Aqabah, at the head of the Red Sea)", see P. K. Hitti, *A Short History of Lebanon*, New York 1965, p. 29.



the port called 'Ophir'.\* Indian words were used for certain mercantile goods, such as: ivory, the Hebrew Text *shen habbin* (elephant's teeth), a literal translation of the Sanskrit *ibha-danta*; 'almug': Sanskrit and Tamil, *valgu*; Greek *santalon*, Sanskrit *chandana*; the word used for ape is *koph*, most probably Sanskrit *kapi*; for peacocks *thuki-im*, the Tamil *tokei*.

Then, in the library of Assurbanipal, the word *Sindhu* is used in the sense of Indian cotton, and the Hebrew *karpas* is obviously derived from the Sanskrit *karpasa*.<sup>11</sup>

Names of deities, Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the heavenly twins Nasatyas, names well known in Vedic mythology are mentioned in the Boghaz Koi inscriptions of the 14th century B.C. Similarly, numerals and other words which appear to be of Aryan origin have also been identified. As these words do not exhibit the changes that distinguish Iranian from Indian forms, they, in the opinion of R. C. Majumdar, "must date back to a period when the Aryan speaking people were not yet distinguished as Iranians and Indians. If we accept this view, we find here remarkable evidence of very close contact between India and Western Asia before the fourteenth century B.C."<sup>12</sup>

Arthur Jeffery has traced the origin of certain Arabic words used in the Qur'an.<sup>13</sup> Many of these words are of Indo-European stock, and entered the Arabic language through the medium of Syriac, Aramaic, Ethiopic, or Middle Persian. In very rare cases has a word been directly borrowed from Sanskrit. What is interesting is the fact that such words, even though bor-

\*R. C. Majumdar, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 611. In all probability this port was in India, and may be identified with modern Sopara (Nalla-Sopara in the Thana District of Bombay). Scholars have looked for its equivalent in such place-names as Abhira or Suppara; Ophir also appears as Sophara in the Septuagint, and Sophir is a term applied in Coptic to southern India; again such an Indian name as Sauviva corresponds to Sophara. Besides, the use of Indian names for the merchandise carried in this expedition raises a strong presumption in favour of their Indian origin (See full discussion in *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 611-612). The Arab travellers and geographers of the Christian era mention Sopara as Sufala, Sufara, Subara, etc. and early Arab trade was directly with this port. The fact that words of Tamil origin are also found for some of the goods carried in this expedition, shows that the port of origin lay somewhere in Peninsular India, and this again supports the view that Ophir was Sopara.

rowed through the media of the West Asian and Iranian languages, had affinities with the Sanskrit language, and were used in the Qur'an as well as in ancient Arabian poetry, the two most important sources of Arabic philology. Although no direct relationship to or borrowing from Sanskrit is likely to be proved, the fact that these examples belong to the Indo-European family is in itself evidence of the long process of social and commercial intercourse that must have taken place between India and the West Asian countries in the centuries immediately preceding Islam. Whereas in West Asia this period was marked by the political supremacy of Persia, in India it marked the rise and fall of the Mauryas and the Guptas. Indeed, the existence of these two great empires whose boundaries touched between Afghanistan and Iran must itself have been a great cause of promotion of cultural exchange.

In the realm of religion and philosophy, there is no positive evidence of contact, but what little there is leaves no doubt that some exchange must have taken place between India and the West Asian countries during the thousand years that passed between the time of Gautama Buddha in India and Prophet Muhammad in Arabia. The north-eastern frontiers of Chandragupta Maurya's empire encompassed the whole Afghanistan. In the later years of his life he turned a mendicant and disappeared into oblivion. Asoka's enthusiasm for Buddhism is proverbial. He had sent missionaries to five Greek rulers: Antiochus of Syria, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Alexander of Epirus or Corinth, Ptolemy of Egypt and Magas of Cyrene. It is claimed that "on account of the activities of Asoka's missionaries his *dhamma* or the Law of Piety was followed in their dominions"<sup>14</sup>. Alexander's conquests had opened the way for the travels of these itinerant religious teachers, and we find from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. a colony of Indians in Alexandria who exercised much influence on the neo-Platonic philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

The traffic was not one way. According to Megasthenes there was a special department in the city of Pataliputra (and probably in other big cities) to look after foreigners, which indicates their influx into India about this time.<sup>16</sup> Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, sent an envoy named Dionysius to the court of the Mauryan emperors, and there is little doubt that the latter also sent similar ambassadors.<sup>17</sup>



According to Athenaeus, in the procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) were to be seen Indian women, Indian hunting dogs, cows, Indian spices carried on camels and many other strange objects. According to the same authority, Philopatur's yacht had a saloon lined with Indian stone.<sup>13</sup>

## II THE GOLDEN PERIOD OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

### A. *The Impact of Indian Culture on the Arabs*

#### (i) *Beginnings of cultural contacts:*

The period of direct and deeper cultural relations between the Arabs and the Indians began a century after the rise of Islam in Arabia, and with the foundation of the Abbasid empire in the middle of the 8th century A.D. This period marked the beginning of a long history of cultural contact which lasted several centuries. During no period of their ancient and mediaeval history perhaps did the Indians have such close relations with the Arabs as they did during this period. The process of exchange was reciprocal, and covered the dissemination and diffusion of the maximum amount of knowledge in the sciences and arts, religion and philosophy and social and cultural ideas and values.

By the beginning of the eighth century A.D. Sind and some parts of Punjab had come under the Arab political influence and formed the eastern wing of the Abbasid Empire whose capital was at Baghdad. Gradually, Sind acquired great prominence in Arab affairs for not only was it ruled militarily and administratively by the Arabs from their capital in al-Mansura\* but a large number of Arab merchants, travellers, missionaries and men of learning and erudition migrated to this province and made it their permanent home. Thus within a short period Sind and parts of Punjab became important centres for the diffusion of Arab culture in India. From here Arab religious thought, cultural values, language and philosophy radiated to different parts of India and the Indians were able to secure first-hand knowledge about them from this region. No region of India had such large number of Arab

\*The ruins of the town lie 47 miles to the north-east of Hyderabad, Sind. See V. Minorsky, *Hudud al-Alam, The Regions of the World* (anonymous), translation and commentary by V. Minorsky, Oxford 1937, p. 372.

settlers as Sind. Al-Mansura and Multan formed the important cultural pockets of the Arabs of Sind.

The political boundary of the Arabs of Sind roughly lay along the lower course of the Indus between Multan in the north and al-Mansura and Daybal in the south. Their immediate neighbours to the east were the powerful Indian rulers belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty whose kingdom extended from Gujarat up to the banks of the Ganges; they were the most formidable enemies of the Arabs of Sind and usually at war with them. The political relations of the Arabs with these princes will be discussed later. Here it may be emphasized that as a result of these estranged political relations the Arabs in general and the Arabs of Sind in particular were unable to get access to other parts of northern and central India. There was, therefore, no possibility of cultural exchange between the Arabs and the Hindus of the north at this period, and this is the reason why Arabic accounts of this period deal mainly with either Sind and Punjab or with southern and eastern India.

In South India Indo-Arab relations rested on a totally different basis. In Sind the Arabs exercised their political power but for the South they came as travellers, merchants and occasionally as missionaries. As such, relations were based not on political antagonism but on cordiality and friendship. The rulers of the Deccan belonging to the Rashtrakuta dynasty welcomed the Arab merchants and travellers in their Kingdom, protected their lives and property and gave them full freedom of religious practice and other facilities. Whether such an attitude was based on commercial or some other considerations cannot be ascertained, though there seem to have been certain political reasons which are discussed elsewhere in this book. But the fact remains that the cordial relations between the Arabs and the Indians in South India, provided for the opportunity for cultural exchange and intellectual communication. The Arab writers of this period are full of praise and admiration for the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan. As in Sind, the Arabs had settled down in many parts of South India as merchant communities, e.g. in Konkan (Maharashtra), Malabar (Kerala), and in many of the coastal towns of Andhra Pradesh, Madras and Mysore. Gujarat and Kathiawar had large numbers of Arabs following different vocations and Eastern India, Bengal and Assam were visited by many Arab merchants and travellers during this period.



Among the Indians who visited the Arab world during this period, there were many scholars, scientists and physicians who sojourned in Baghdad which was a great centre of intellectual and cultural activity. Also there was continuous traffic of Indian merchants and traders to Iraq, Egypt, the Persian Gulf and other regions. Apart from scholars and merchants, many Indian prisoners of war or emigrants settled down there and became naturalized citizens and were treated as such by the Arabs. These arabicized Indians are referred to as *al-Zutt*\* by Arab historians. They were most probably the Jats.

There is a legend based on *Keralolpathi* that Cheraman Perumal, the last Perumal of Kerala, became a convert to Islam, visited Mecca and received the blessings of the prophet Muhammad in Jeddah; but this seems to have no historical basis. However, the story that the first person to embrace Islam in Kerala was a king may have some truth in it. According to some historians he was a Zamorine who also visited Mecca after his conversion. This may, however, be taken as marking the beginnings of Islam in Kerala.\*\*

Thus it may be said that the main agents, both among the Arabs and the Indians, responsible for the transmission of ideas and beliefs and for direct or indirect cultural influences were the many known and unknown scholars, Sufis and missionaries, merchants and travellers, and above all the cultured, impartial and unprejudiced rulers of India as well as the Abbasid Caliphs and their illustrious ministers and courtiers.

#### *Beginnings of Indo-Arab scientific exchange*

Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate for over five centuries (A.D. 750-1258) and the capital of a vast

\**Al-Zutt* were considered as part of Banu Tamim. They were given the status of Arabs since the days of Abu Musa. They lived in Basra, but their number was not great, and in A.H. 49 (A.D. 669) some of them went to Antioch. Their number, however, increased after the conquest of Sind by the Arabs. They were captured in the wars and transferred to Basra (Salih Ahmad El-Ali, *al-tanzimat al-ijtima'iya wa 'l-iqtisadiya fi 'l-Basra*, Baghdad, 1953, pp. 28, 42, 71-72).

\*\*Most historians have agreed that the time of the last Perumal was the 9th century, A.D. but according to the Mangalore edition of the *Keralolpathi*, the conversion of Perumal and his pilgrimage to Mecca took place in A.D. 355. (See K. N. Gopala Pillai, *Kerala Maha Charithram*, Vol. II, Trivendram, 1949, pp. 84-89).

empire sometime termed by Arab writers *Mamlakat al-Islam* (the Kingdom of Islam), provided the maximum opportunity and scope for the growth of a scientific and cultural atmosphere and a free and liberal academic environment in the latter half of the eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries. This was the period when Indian scientists, physicians and philosophers visited the capital of the empire and came in contact with a new, rising nation and a dynamic Islamic society. Financial assistance by the State and patronage of Caliphs like Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (A.D. 754-75), Harun al-Rashid (A.D. 786-809) and al-Ma'mun (A.D. 813-833) were not the only factors that resulted in the general promotion of learning and education among the Arabs and in research and academic activity. The positive and deliberate efforts of some of the Caliphs like al-Ma'mun in giving full freedom of work to those engaged in research in various academic centres in the city was a factor that cannot be overlooked. Whenever such liberty and intellectual freedom was refused to scholars and men of learning, the growth of science was arrested and contribution to knowledge came to a standstill. There was yet another factor which came in the way of intellectual progress. Quite often the narrow educational concepts and outlook of the orthodox ulama (theologians) as also of some orthodox-minded scientists, resulted in the decline of educational standards and prevented knowledge from progressing. Islamic history provides ample examples of this. This was one of the basic reasons for the decline of science and education among the Arabs of the Abbasid period which brought about the general decline and stagnation of Islamic society in the post-Abbasid period. This point has been further developed later in this chapter.

India's cultural contacts with the Arab world were established as early as the eighth century i.e. long before such an academic and intellectual decline took place in the Arab world. In this century, the Arabs were still in the process of acquiring knowledge from different sources—Greek, Indian or Iranian. Education was in vogue and academic institutions and centres of higher learning and research, like the 'house of wisdom' (*Bayt al-Hikma*)\* in Baghdad,

\* Founded by al-Ma'mun in Baghdad in 830; it combined a library, an academy and a translation bureau which "in many respects proved the most important educational institution since the foundation of the Alexandrian Museum in the first half of the third century B.C.", P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London 1961, p. 310.



were being inaugurated. No doubt some of the theological and linguistic sciences like the Traditions (Hadith), history, grammar, philology and rhetorics had already been sufficiently advanced by the Arabs and the reading and writing of Arabic had become fairly popular. But the Arab scholars and the educated class were still not quite familiar with the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, philosophy and logic of the ancient Greeks, Indians and Iranians, with some exceptions like Persian and Greek medicine and alchemy. Whatever may have been the causes of the dissemination of the Greek sciences in the Arab world of the time, it is certain that Indian science, philosophy, wisdom-literature and religious thought first appeared in the Arab academic circles through the efforts of the early Abbasid Caliphs and their ministers, the Baramika. The latter were converts from Buddhism and originally came from Balkh in Central Asia during the Umayyad period, gradually acquiring high administrative posts and ultimately rising to the positions of viziers under the Abbasids. As they were highly placed in society and interested in India, they were able to invite Indian scientists to Baghdad and give them all encouragement and facilities for work. It is said that Caliph al-Mansur received an embassy from Sind which consisted of Indian pundits who presented the Caliph with several treatises on mathematics and astronomy which were translated into Arabic with the help of these pundits by the orders of the Caliph. Thus from about the middle of the eighth century an era of Indo-Arab scientific co-operation may be said to have begun. The scientific literature of India that was introduced in Baghdad actually belonged to the Maurya and the Gupta periods. Indian philosophers and scientists of these periods were generally treated by the Arabs on a par with the ancient Greeks. But ironically enough, after an age of prosperity, political unity and intellectual and scientific ascendancy during the Maurya and Gupta periods, India, at a later period, passed through a phase of general decline in science and learning; on the other hand the Arabs, having assimilated India's scientific knowledge and achievements, advanced in the subsequent centuries.

(ii) *Introduction of India's Scientific Literature to the Arabs*

India's ancient scientific literature was introduced to the Arabs either at Baghdad directly where Sanskrit works were made avail-

able to the savants\*, or indirectly via Jundishapur which was a great centre of medical and other learning and where Greek, Indian and Iranian knowledge intermingled. We shall now deal with each of the Indian sciences separately and discuss how each was transmitted to the Arabs and to what extent it exercised its influence in the growth of that science in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages.

### ASTRONOMY

Astronomy was one of the first sciences that was introduced in Baghdad academic circles towards the end of the eighth century A.D. It was through *Surya Siddhanta*\*\* (Ar.: *Sindhind*) that Arab scientists became acquainted with Indian astronomy. The work is said to have been introduced by an Indian traveller in about A.D. 771. It was rendered into Arabic by al-Fazari at the order of the Caliph al-Mansur (A.D. 753-775). From this time onwards and as a result of the pioneering effort of al-Fazari, Indian astronomy was studied by the Arabs with greater effort and interest.

Among other Sanskrit astronomical works introduced to the Arabs at this time were: *Aryabhatiya*† (Ar.: *Arjabhad* or *Arjabhar*) by Aryabhat of Kusumpura (b. A.D. 476); *Khandakhadyaka*†† (Ar.: *al-Arkand*) by Brahmagupta (b. A.D. 598) who flourished in Ujjain.

The introduction of these works gave an impetus to the

\* Whether a delegation of Indian scientists from Sind was responsible for the introduction of these works in Baghdad or whether individuals like Manka (Manikya?) were responsible is immaterial. The important point is that Sanskrit literature became available to the Arabs from the end of the eighth century A.D.

\*\*According to J. Filliozat, the work was first published in the sixth century B.C. and the original version was subsequently re-edited. Al-Biruni has attributed the work to one Lata. (For further information on the work, see J. Filliozat, 'Ancient Indian Science', *Ancient and Medieval Science*, ed. Rene Taton, Translation by A. J. Pomerans, London 1963, pp. 141-145.

†Completed by about the beginning of the sixth century A.D. (J. Filliozat, *Ancient and Medieval Science*, p. 145).

††Written in A.D. 665, this work provided material for astronomical calculations, but it was based on a lost work of Aryabhata, who again agreed with the *Surya Siddhanta*, A. Barriedale Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1961, p. 522.



growth of astronomical studies in Baghdad. A number of Arab astronomers engaged themselves in the study of the Indian works. They produced several works and elaborate commentaries after the style of the Indian works, adding to them the results of their own observations and readings in the observatories at Baghdad.\* Among them was Ibrahim b. Habib al-Fazari (A.D. 753-775) who wrote *Kitab al-Zij* based on the *Siddhanta*.\*\* Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi (d. after A.D. 847) based his work, the astronomical tables (*al-Zij*), on that of al-Fazari's and syncretized the Greek and the Indian system, at the same time adding his own contributions.<sup>1</sup> He also wrote another treatise *al-Sindhind al-Saghir* (the Small *Sindhind*)<sup>2</sup>. Another astronomer Habash b. 'Abd Allah al-Marvazi (flourished during the second half of the 9th century) wrote *al-Sindhind* (based on the *Siddhanta*).<sup>3</sup> Thus, for several centuries to come, Arab astronomers continued to be interested in Indian astronomy and produced commentaries and translations. Al-Biruni (d. 1048) made a special study of the subject during his sojourn in India during the 11th century. He translated several Sanskrit works on astronomy into Arabic.<sup>4</sup>

The contribution of Indian astronomy in the growth of Arab astronomy was both conceptual and philological. Many Sanskrit astronomical terms were Arabicized and freely used by Arab astronomers in their treatises: *Kardajā* (Ssk. *Karamajya*) was used and later replaced by Arabic *witr mustawi*; then; *jib* (Ssk. *Jiva*), *auj* (Ssk. *uch*), and *budhmasa* (Ssk. *Adhmaas*, meaning the lunar month) were used by early Arab astronomers. The "language of the Hindus" is described by al-Biruni as being "extremely rich in nouns both original and derivative, so that in some instances they call one thing by a multitude of different names." He says, "So I have heard them saying that they have a thousand names all

\*One of the observatories was established at Baghdad near the Sham-masiya Gate (Carra de Vaux, "Astronomy and Mathematics", *The Legacy of Islam*, ed. by Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, London 1943, p. 381).

\*\*It was written after A. H. 170/786 and al-Mac'udi had consulted it (*Muruj al-Dhahab was Ma'adin al-Jauhar*, *Les Prairies d'Or*, ed. and French translation by Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteilles, Paris, 1861-77, Vol. iv, pp. 37-41; cf. Tanbih, ed. Cairo, p. 169; C. Nallino, 'Ilm al-falak, ta'rikhuhu'ind al-Arab fi 'l-quran al-wusta, Rome, 1911-12, pp. 149-50, 156-62).

meaning *sun*; and, no doubt each planet has quite as many, or nearly as many names, since they could not do with less (for the purposes of verification)".<sup>5</sup>

Among the Indian astronomical theories which became popular with Arab writers was the concept of *kalpa* which the Arab writers called "*the days of the Sindhind*" or "*the days of the world*."<sup>6</sup> Al-Biruni points out that from the concept that the destruction of the world takes place at the end of a *kalpa* was derived the theory of Abu Ma'shar (d. A.D. 886) "that a deluge takes place at the conjunction of the planets, because, in fact, they stand in conjunction at the end of each *caturyuga* and at the beginning of each *kaliyuga*. If this conjunction is not a complete one, the deluge, too, will evidently not attain the highest degree of its destructive power."<sup>7</sup>

Describing the reasons for the popularity of astronomy among the Indians al-Biruni says that it was "most famous among them, since the affairs of their religion are in various ways connected with it. If a man wants to gain the title of an astronomer, he must not only know scientific or mathematical astronomy, but also astrology."<sup>8</sup>

## MATHEMATICS

Like astronomy Indian mathematics was also introduced to the Arabs towards the end of the eighth century. Through the translations of the Sanskrit mathematical treatises into Arabic rendered by al-Fazari, the Indian numeral system (in Arabic, *Hindi*, and in Europe, *Arabic*) and the concept of the zero became known to the Arabs. The tables of al-Khwarizmi and Habash al-Hasib (d. between 867 and 874) "probably spread the use of them throughout the Arabic world."<sup>\*</sup>

But, as pointed out by Hitti, the Arab astronomers and mathematicians were slow to adopt this ingenious invention of

\*Hitti, *H. O. A.*, p. 379. But Carra de Vaux is of the view that "the word *Hindi* is easily confused in the Arabic script with *hindasi* which means what relates to geometry or the art of the engineer; in various cases in which the word *Hindi* is used, the meaning of *hindasi* fits better"; in his opinion, "It is very likely that the Arabs obtained these signs, like so much of their science, from the tradition of the neo-Platonic schools".

"Astronomy and Mathematics", in *The Legacy of Islam*, pp. 384-85.



the Hindus, for as late as the eleventh century scientists like Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Karaji (d. between 1019 and 1029) still wrote all numbers in his *al-Kafi fi'l-Hisab* in words. But Ahmad al-Nasawi (d.c. 1040) used the Indian numerals in his *al-Muqni' fi'l-Hisab al-Hindi*.<sup>9</sup> The Arabic numerals (*ghubar*) "were written from right to left and, according to their position (from the right), they represented units, tens, hundreds, etc. Whenever the number to be expressed lacked units, ten or hundreds, a point was written in the appropriate place of the 'word'. This point was our Zero".<sup>10</sup> The Indians used 'a place-value notion' in their system. Thus, arithmetic naturally led the Arabs to algebra.<sup>11</sup>

In geometry, while the basis of Arabic geometry was the works of Euclid (Book X of the *Elements* and a number of lost works), "their experimental approach caused the Arabs to present many more problems where Euclid had deemed one sufficient. There were unmistakable traces of the Indian *Siddhantas* in their work."<sup>12</sup>

"In trigonometry the Arabs were vastly superior to the Greeks and the Indians, to whose sine and cosine tables they added tables of the other trigonometrical functions, and then established the fundamental relations between them."<sup>13</sup>

### GEOGRAPHY

The influence of Indian astronomy on Arab scientific thought was much deeper than that of Indian geography. However, although Greek and Iranian geographical ideas had a deeper and more lasting effect, Indian concepts and methods were well known to the Arabs. Among the various geographical concepts with which the Arab scientists became acquainted was the view of Aryabhata that the daily rotation of the heavens is only apparent, being caused by the rotation of the earth on its own axis.\* The concept was described by several Arab geographers in their works, but the view that the earth was stationary continued to dominate, even though discussions did follow among astronomers on the subject. Other concepts with which the

\*Brahmagupta (b. 598) the author of *Brahmasphuta Siddhanta*, was an opponent of Aryabhata's doctrine that the earth rotated (J. Filliozat, *Ancient and Medieval Science*, p. 146).

Arabs were acquainted were: 1. The proportion of water and land on the surface of the earth was half and half; 2. the land-mass, which was compared to a tortoise, was surrounded by water on all sides, and was shaped like a dome whose highest point had Mount Meru on it; 3. the Northern hemisphere was the inhabited part of the earth and its four limits were Jamakut in the East, Rum in the West, Lanka, the Cupola and Sidpur; 4. the inhabited part of the earth was divided into nine parts.<sup>14</sup>

Arab astronomers and geographers mistook *Ujjain* (Ar.: *Urayn* or *Uzayn*) for the 'Cupola of the Earth' (*Qubbat al-ard*). According to the Indian system, the Prime Meridian passed through Ceylon, the Cupola of the Earth, and the same meridian passed through Ujjain and reached the legendary Mount Meru in the North, which was supposed to be directly under the North Star. This was the highest point of the land-mass, which was shaped like a dome. The intersection of the Equator at Ceylon which was supposed to be exactly midway between the Canary Islands (*al-jaza'ir al-khalidat*, off the coast of North-West Africa) and China in the East, with the Prime Meridian passing through Ceylon, was therefore termed 'the Cupola of the Earth'. But since the Prime Meridian also passed through Ujjain which had a great reputation for astronomical studies, it was mistaken for being the Cupola by the Arab geographers and astronomers.<sup>15</sup> Although the Arab geographers usually calculated the longitudes of towns from the Canary Islands after the practice of the Greek astronomers, some of them calculated them from the Prime Meridian passing through Ujjain.

#### MEDICINE

Apart from the Baramika viziers several courtiers of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809) like Abu 'Umar 'Ajami Ishaq b. Sulayman al-Hashimi and Abu Hatim al-Balkhi were interested in medicine. It is related that when Harun al-Rashid suffered from a serious disease, the Arab physicians of Baghdad who were well versed with Greek medicine were unable to cure him. So, at the suggestion of the courtiers, an Indian physician named Manka (Manikya?) was called in by the Caliph. He treated the Caliph and cured him. He was rewarded and was later attached to the hospital of the Baramika. He translated several works



from Sanskrit into Arabic or Persian. Among other Indian physicians of Baghdad was Ibn Dahn, probably a descendent of Dhanapati. He was called to Baghdad by Yahya b. Khalid and was appointed by him as the director of the hospital. Another physician was Salih, the son or descendent of Bhela. He was probably the same person as Sali, the son or descendent of the famous physician Bhea. Salih treated Ibrahim, a cousin of Caliph Harun al-Rashid of epilepsy. He was probably a private practitioner of Indian medicine in Baghdad. When Ibrahim was declared dead by the royal physician Gabriel Bakhtishu who was an expert in Greek medicine, Salih challenged him and demonstrated that the patient was still alive, by pricking a needle into Ibrahim's left hand which immediately withdrew. He was then taken out of the coffin and dressed properly. Salih then prepared some snuff of *Kundush* (*veratilum Album*) and blew it into the nose of the patient. After about ten minutes his body quivered and he sneezed; then he sat up and kissed the hands of the Caliph.<sup>16</sup> These stories only go to show how popular Indian physicians had been in Baghdad during the early 'Abbasid period. But the Indian medical system was known to the Arabs probably from very early times. The Quraysh tribe of Mecca handled the drug and spice trade and hence came into frequent contact with India and Persia. The drug merchants had to supply not only "directions for use" but possibly medical, pharmacological, botanical and mineralogical explanations as well. The first Arab physician, Al-Harith (born in Ta'if), a contemporary of Prophet Muhammad, travelled to India and to Persia, where he studied and taught in the famous school at Jundishapur.<sup>17</sup>

Indian medical science (Ayurveda) was, however, properly introduced to the Arab world only after several of the classical Indian works on the subject were translated into Arabic under the patronage of the early 'Abbasid caliphs. Thus the Arabs became familiar with Indian physicians like Kanka (Kanyakana), Sanjhal (Sandelia?), Shanaq (Chanakya)\* and Jaudhar (Yasho-

\*The Book of Shanaq "may well have been the Arabic version of the Indian name Canakya (c. 320 B.C.) for according to Bettina Strauss, the work was based on *Caraka Samhita*, particularly in its identification of poisonous substances and the distinction between 'mobile' poisons derived from animal products and 'immobile' poisons derived



dhara?).<sup>18</sup> Among the works translated into Arabic were: *Charaka*, *Susrud* (*Susruta*), *Ashtankar* (*Ashtanghradaya*), *Nidan* (*Nidana*), *Sindhastag* or *Sindhashan* (*Siddhayoga*) and *Kitab al-Sumum* (*the Book of Poisons*). A work by an Indian woman physician, Rusa, dealing with women's diseases was also translated into Arabic. Besides, several other works on different types of snakes and their poisons, drugs, treatment of pregnant women, intoxicants, diseases and medicaments, effects of mania and hysteria, were also rendered into Arabic.<sup>19</sup>

Thus by the middle of the 9th century A.D. the Arab writers had at their disposal not only most of the Greek medical works but also most of the important Indian medical works. But in the opinion of Siddiqi, whereas the Arabs were very largely influenced by the Greek system, the influence of the Indian writers on them was confined to the therapeutics and medicaments only. The medical works and theories of the Indians did not appeal to them and the names of *Charaka* and *Susruta* are very sparingly mentioned by them. *Ashtanghradaya* and the *Nidana* are referred to by only 'Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari and his pupil Abu Bakr Zakariyya al-Razi.<sup>20</sup> The former in his work *Firdaus al-Hikma* (completed in A.D. 850) gave a brief account of the whole system of Indian medicine at the end of the book, based on *Charaka*, *Susruta*, *Nidana* and *Ashtanghradaya*. Similarly, al-Razi referred to many Indian medical works in his Magnum Opus, *al-Hawi*. After 'Ali and al-Razi, Arabic medical writers seldom refer to Indian medical works except *Charaka* and *Susruta* which are referred to in connection with drugs and medicaments.<sup>21</sup>

In the opinion of M. Z. Siddiqi, in spite of the close collaboration of the Indian and the Arab medical men in Baghdad and the dissemination of Indian medical knowledge in Arab medical circles, the Indian system seemed to have gained little success as compared to the Greek system. The reasons are given by some writers like 'Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari who says that the Indians think "that fever and other diseases are cured by the force of patients' imagination". "They hold still stranger views,"

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from mineral and vegetable substances." The Arabs were deeply influenced by this book and by the ideas of the Indians on toxicology, but in the matter of preparation of poisons and treatment of cases they followed the Greek methods which they considered rational and useful. (R. Arnaldez and L. Massignon, *op. cit.*, p. 417.)

he says, "which I would not like to mention even if they were true." The reasoning of the Indians as compared to that of the Greeks on points of difference did not appeal to them and he declares himself to be simply a narrator of Indian medicine and not a follower of it.<sup>22</sup> While the Indian medical system did not fully succeed in influencing Arabian medicine in the early centuries of the 'Abbasid period it succeeded in the later centuries in influencing the Persian medical works produced in India<sup>23</sup> which were also primarily based on the Arabian-Greek systems. The Yunani (Greek) medical system as practised in India today, is the successor of this very ancient system in which the knowledge and experience of the Greeks, Iranians, Arabs and Indians has been preserved.

### (iii) Fiction, Philosophy and Religious Literature

As compared to the scientific literature of India, literary works in Sanskrit were less known to the Arabs. There were hardly any Arabic renderings of the classical works. What little was translated is well known and became popular literature in medieval times. The reason for this probably lay in the fact that by the time the Arabs became aware of Indian literature, Arabic literature was sufficiently advanced both in prose and poetry and had developed various forms and styles. Hence, the urge to look for or to accept forms and styles from foreign sources was absent. This applied to classical Greek literature also, which largely remained untranslated into Arabic. Arab literary critics, however, studied Greek theories and concepts of literary criticism, especially the works of Aristotle. In this also Arab men of letters seemed to have felt little or no need to adopt new literary forms, like the drama that were foreign to Arab genius. Similarly, the great Indian epics and philosophical works like the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana*, etc. were not rendered into Arabic probably on account of their religious content.

One of the Indian literary works that did become well known in the Arabic-speaking world of the middle ages was the Arabic translation of the Pahlawi version of the *Pancatantra* entitled *Kalila wa Dimna*. During the reign of Nushirwan (A.D. 531-79), Buzurjmihr was specially sent to India (Ganges) to procure a copy of the *Fables of Bidpai* also known as *Kalila wa Dimna*. He procured this book and the game of chess;



the work was then rendered into Pahlawi. The title of the work was derived from Karataka and Damanaka, the two jackals who figure in the first book of *Pancatantra*.<sup>\*</sup> The Arabic rendition was done by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d.c. 757), a Zoroastrian convert to Islam.<sup>\*\*</sup>

Al-Mas'udi mentions *Kitab al-Sindbad* or 'the Book of the Seven Ministers, the Master, the Youth and the King's wife' by a certain Sindbad who lived during the reign of Korash. This work corresponded to the Persian *Sindbadnameh* and the plan of this work was taken from *Pancatantra*. The story is added as a note in *The Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>†</sup>

Then, parts of *Mahabharata* were rendered into Arabic by Abu Salih b. Shu'ayb and later by Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali Jabali (c. 1026). Again, the ethical writings of Canakya (*Shanaq*) and the *Hitopadesa*, and other works ranging from logic to magic were translated from Sanskrit into Arabic.<sup>‡</sup>

(iv) *Sufism, Buddhism and Hindu Religious Thought*

The Arabs came in direct contact with Buddhism as a living force in India and Central Asia soon after the rise of Islam in Arabia. In Central Asia, the conquest of Balkh brought them face to face with Buddhism and its adherents. In Sind, they had much closer and intimate relations.<sup>25</sup> There is enough historical evidence indicating the flourishing state of Buddhism in Sind at the time of the Arab conquest. At this period both "Buddhism and Hinduism flourished side by side. The King was a Brahmin, and the governors were generally Buddhists. The ruler of Brahmanabad, Agham Lohana also had professed Buddhism and his

<sup>\*</sup>See S. Maqbul Ahmad, *Al-Mas'udi Millenary Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta 1960, p. 103 and note (2). According to Keith the work was produced during the period of Brahmanical restoration and expansion under the Guptas or just before the founding of their empire, and Vishnucharman was probably its author who related the tales to the sons of the King Amarashakti of Mihilaropya in the Deccan (*ibid.*, p. 103, note 2; cf. Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 248).

<sup>\*\*</sup>The original Persian and Sanskrit versions were lost, hence almost all translations into European languages as also into Hebrew, Turkish, Ethiopic, Malay and even Icelandic were done from the Arabic version (Hitti, *H.O.A.*, p. 308).

<sup>†</sup>See S. Maqbul Ahmad, *M.M.C.V.*, p. 104, note 1, Korash of al-Mas'udi may be identified with Harshvardhana (probably died about A.D. 647).





spiritual guide Samani Budhgui 'owned an idol-house or temple, which was called Budh Nawwihar'.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the actual contact of the Arabs with the Buddhists of the time, Arabic literature produced during this period, and specially works on histories of religions and sects, furnish valuable synopses of Buddhist beliefs and practices as current in India at the time. One such 'sect' was the Shamaniya\* which is referred to by many Arab writers. The adherents of this sect are described as those who rejected totally the idea of a Creator or of the apostles (*rusul*) and confirmed the truth of Retribution and Punishment. These could be no other than a sect of the Buddhists. In his division of the Hindu religions, Shahrastani (A.D. 1086-1153) classified the Brahmans as those who basically rejected the prophecy. They are further divided into three categories: one of these is termed as *the ashab al-budda*, or the Buddhists. They are said to have conceived of Buddha as one who is not born to anyone. He neither marries, nor eats and drinks, nor grows old and dies. In the second category fall 'the people of meditation and contemplation', *ashab al-tanasukh* and in the third 'those who believed in the transmigration of the soul' *ashab al-fikra*.<sup>27</sup> The concept of Buddha as presented by Shahrastani is akin to the concept of Bodhisattva. Arabic works on the life of Gautama Buddha were also current at this time even though of a legendary character. Books like *Kitab al-Budd*, *Kitab al-Balawhar wa Budhasaf* and *Kitab Budhasaf Mufrad* were current among the Arabs. The legend of Balahvar "was rendered into Arabic verse by a heretical poet Aban al-Lahiqi (d. 815) and approximated with the Shi'i doctrine of the absent imam by Babawayh Qummi (d. 991)."<sup>28</sup> The *Treatises* of the Ikhwan al-Safa have some adaptations from it and show "some oblique Buddhist influences."<sup>29</sup>

How far did Buddhist philosophy or Hindu religious thought influence Sufism in its early phases and to what extent did they form a theoretical and conceptual basis for its growth? These problems have been studied by several modern authorities and there is considerable difference of opinion on the subject. But R. A. Nicholson's view still seems to be the most unbiased and

\*The word is derived from the Sanskrit *Sramana*, meaning 'a religious mendicant'; for the monk Sakyamuni is 'the great Ascetic' (*Maha-sramana*).

objective. Commenting on the growth of mysticism of all great types, he says, "Just as the Christian type cannot be understood without reference to Christianity, so the Mohammedan type must be viewed in connection with the outward and inward development of Islam."<sup>30</sup> The fact that Islamic asceticism had its origins in the concepts of 'piety' and 'fear' of God as embodied in the Qur'an is indisputable but the later stages of the growth of Sufism betray certain concepts which were alien to Islam. Among "the most important external" influences on Sufism Nicholson enumerates Christianity, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> So that the external influences may not be overemphasized while losing sight of the internal factors, namely, the teachings of Islam, Nicholson further clarifies the point. He says, "Even if Islam had been miraculously shut off from contact with foreign religions and philosophies, some form of mysticism would have arisen within it, for the seeds were already there."<sup>32</sup> According to him Sufism in its "method so far as it is one of ethical self-culture, ascetic meditation, and intellectual abstraction, owes a great deal to Buddhism." But in spirit, he points out, the two systems are poles apart. While the "Buddhist moralises himself, the Sufi becomes moral only through knowing and loving God."<sup>33</sup> Nicholson compares the Sufi concept of *fana* with Nirvana and remarks, "Both terms imply the passing away of individuality, but while Nirvana is purely negative, *fana* is accompanied by *baqa*, everlasting life in God."<sup>34</sup> In his opinion the concept of *fana* first expounded by the Persian mystic Bayazid of Bistam (d.c. 875) is actually comparable to the pantheism of the Vedanta.<sup>35</sup> On his concept of *fana*, several sayings are attributed to Bayazid: "Creatures are subject to changing 'states', but the gnostic has no 'state', because his vestiges are effaced and his essence annihilated by the essence of another, and his traces are lost in another's traces."<sup>36</sup> Once he was asked how he attained his stage of Sufism, so he answered, "I cast off my own self as a serpent casts off its skin. Then I considered my own self, and found that I was He', i.e. God".<sup>37</sup> In spite of the difference between the two concepts, *fana* and Nirvana, Nicholson does not regard them as "being altogether unconnected" for both have an ethical aspect which "involves the extinction of all passions and desires," and he concludes that "the Sufi theory of *fana* was influenced to some extent by Buddhism as well as by Perso-Indian

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pantheism."<sup>33</sup> The theory that Bayazid may have received the concept of *fana* from his teacher Abu Ali of Sind<sup>39</sup> who in turn may have been influenced by Sankaracarya<sup>40</sup> is disputed by Arberry and others.<sup>41</sup> Aziz Ahmad in his study 'Sufism and Hindu Mysticism' has authentically clarified many of the problems relating to the subject. "Sufism," he says, "seems to have come into contact with Hindu and Buddhist mystical ideas at a later stage, and after most of its principal features had been developed either in its original Islamic tradition or by the infiltration of neo-Platonic and Christian elements."<sup>42</sup> Among the main features analogous to Sufism and Buddhism quoted by him on the authority of scholars like Goldziher, Nicholson, Zaehner and others are: the 'noble path' of the Buddhists and mystic 'path' (*tariqa*) of the Sufis; Sufi 'concentration' (*muraqaba*) and the Buddhist *dhyana*; Sufi interpretation of Divine Unity (*tawhid*) regarded by Goldziher as having been borrowed from Indian theosophy.<sup>43</sup> Abu Yazid's 'imagery of oceans and rivers' traced to Buddhist sources like *Udanavarga* by Zaehner; Sufi exercises like *habs-i dam* (holding back of breath) seems to have been derived through Buddhist channels from yogic *pranayama* (Kremer); the Sufi concept of 'peace with all' (*Sulh-i Kul*) seems to have been borrowed from Mahayana Buddhism rather than directly from Yogic Hinduism; and lastly, the use of the robe, rosary, etc.<sup>44</sup> Al-Biruni has drawn many interesting parallels between the teachings of the Hindu scriptures and Sufi thought.<sup>45</sup> He points out the kinship between the doctrine of Patanjali wherein Brahman is compared to an *Asvattha* tree where the desire of the intelligent man is to fell this tree, to settle in the place where it had grown and finally to attain the divine light, and that of the Sufi regarding meditation on *the Truth*, i.e. God, for they say, "As long as you point to something, you are not a *monist*; but when *the Truth* seizes upon the object of your pointing and annihilates it, then there is no longer an indicating person nor an object indicated."<sup>46</sup> One of the fundamental Sufi concepts was the essential unity of all existence (*wahdat al-wujud*). They conceived of Truth (*Haqq*) or God as being immanent in the whole world (*wahdat al-shuhud*) and did not distinguish between *Khaliq* (Creator) and *makhluq* (created one) as the traditional Islamic belief had taught. This pantheistic view of life dominated the entire history of Sufism in Islam. But to reach a stage where one could perceive this Truth (God) or



become one with it by self-annihilation (*fana*) one had to pass through several stages of gradual higher attainment: *Shari'a* (Islamic Law), *tariqa* (the 'path'), *ma'rifa* (gnosis) and finally, *haqiqa* (Truth). One could achieve the final stage by meditation and continuous recitation of the names of God (*dhikr*) and through one's own inner light. The pantheistic concept was generally regarded as heresy in orthodox Islam and the most unpardonable heresy was that in which a man compared himself to the Creator. Al-Hallaj who was executed upon the cross in A.D. 922 "did not claim Divinity for himself, though the utterance which led to his execution, 'I am the Truth' (*ana 'l-haqq*) seemed to his judges to have that implication."<sup>47</sup> Arberry considers him the supreme example, even more extreme than Abu Yazid, of the "intoxicated" Sufi.<sup>48</sup> The following verse by him reveals the depth of his pantheistic view of God:—

"I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I.  
We are two souls dwelling in one body.  
When thou seest me, thou seest Him;  
And when thou seest Him, thou seest us both."<sup>49</sup>

Al-Hallaj visited Sind but it cannot be said categorically whether he derived any inspiration for his mystical outlook from the Hindu sources. Tara Chand considers al-Hallaj's concept "of the relation of God with man as the infusion of the divine into the human soul" analogous with the Hindu concept of "the illumination of *buddhi* by *Purusa*."<sup>50</sup>

Whether Hindu ascetic ideas and practices had anything to do with those of the blind Syrian poet Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (d. 1057) is a moot point. Massignon regarded the theory of Margoliouth and Kremer "regarding the conversion of Abu'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri to Hinduism as unverified."<sup>51</sup> But the fact remains that al-Ma'arri was a vegetarian and led a simple ascetic life. He believed in *tanasukh* (metempsychosis) and was highly critical of Arab society and generally had a pessimistic outlook on life. Taha Husayn, one of the foremost Arab philosophers and men of letters of Egypt today, holds the view that al-Ma'arri must have

\*Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad, 1963, pp. 70-71. But Aziz Ahmad takes it as "anything but an unconnected, though analogical, mystical development." See *op. cit.*, p. 125.

acquired his ideas on asceticism from the Indian merchants in Baghdad, which city he visited, and that he had even expressed the desire that he should be cremated after his death and not buried which will was not carried out.\*

Deriving its doctrines and beliefs from various Islamic and non-Islamic sources in the early stages of its development, Sufism played a fundamental role in the history of the growth of Islamic thought. The intellectual appeal of its basic teachings of universal brotherhood, love and humanitarianism and its concepts of the essential unity of all beings and of equality of all men in the eyes of God acted as an antidote against the traditional beliefs and teachings of the orthodox 'ulama. In spite of the constant pronouncements and dicta of the Shar'iyin (those who followed the Shari'a) against its 'heretical' and 'un-Islamic' beliefs, Sufism continued to grow and reinvigorate itself until it was formally embraced and incorporated into Islam by al-Ghazzali. Yet, those among the Muslims who wielded political power continued to send to the gallows many a Sufi in the latter period of Islamic history for motives other than the philosophical or religious. The forceful and challenging undercurrent of Sufism within Islam provided on the one hand, a certain amount of vitality to the very existence of the faith and, on the other, a forceful appeal for conversion to Islam throughout the Middle Ages. Neither the sword nor the might of the most powerful Muslim potentate could, whether by blood or by creating fear, bring about a change of heart much less a change of belief. Examples of conversions by the Sufis are innumerable.

### B. *The Impact of Arab Culture on Mediaeval India*

#### (i) *Islam and the Bhakti Schools*

From the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, South India was an important centre of religious reforms and revival. It is there that the Vaisnava and the Saivite saints started the school of Bhakti, and Sankara (d. 820), Ramanuja (d. 1137), Nimbadiya (12th century), Basava (12th century), Vallabhacharya (15th century) and Madhava (1199-1278) expounded their philosophical systems. From the south the impulse was transmitted to the

\*These views were expressed to me by Dr. Taha Husayn during the course of a conversation with him in Cairo on March 13, 1964.



North through Ramananda (15th century). Up to the eighth century the North had been the centre of religious activity, but as a result of the political decline and the decline of Buddhism, South India from this period onwards became the centre of religious reforms. There was a long lease of prosperity and power under the rule of the Cholas and the Vijayanagar kings; "and above all it was there in the south that Islam came into contact with Hinduism and leavened the growing mass of Hindu thought."<sup>51</sup> "The eighth century was thus a period of revolutionary activity in religion and politics".<sup>52</sup> "It was during this period of strenuous activity that the foundations of later religious development in the south were laid."<sup>53</sup>

In his masterly survey of the various schools of *Bhakti* and the interrelationship between their teachings on the one hand, and those of Christianity and Islam on the other, Tara Chand took into consideration the various opinions and conclusions of the orientalists on the subject. While some scholars "ascribed these changes to the influence of Christian communities in the south,"<sup>54</sup> others held "more or less explicitly that the development was due to internal causes only, because the historical conditions necessary for Christian contact in the south were wanting."<sup>55</sup> Others like Fawcett and Barth suggested "that Islam was probably the needed factor."<sup>56</sup> Tara Chand's own argument runs as follows: "It is necessary to repeat", he says, "that most of the elements in the southern schools of devotion and philosophy, taken singly, were derived from ancient systems; but the elements in their totality and in their peculiar emphasis betray a singular approximation to Muslim faith and therefore make the argument for Islamic influence probable."<sup>57</sup> It is true, he says, that the evidence in regard to the schools he discussed was all circumstantial and the argument for borrowing could not be substantiated by direct proof, philological or otherwise; but the Hindus "were great artists in the assimilation of foreign ideas and they did not allow their prestige to be lowered by crude imitations which could be easily detected."<sup>58</sup> In his opinion the influence of Islam on the *Bhakti* schools was "in the first stages indirect and selective. It was not the result — so far as can be ascertained — of a study of the Muslim literature, but of the teaching from the mouth of religious ascetics or of observation of their rites and customs."<sup>59</sup> The great religious thinkers of the south and the successors of Sankara like

Ramanuja, Visnuswami (13th century), Madhava and Nimbarka (12th century), and the hymn-makers, "in their speculations and religious tone, show closer parallelism" to Islam. "Sankar's life is wrapped in legend and direct testimony of any kind is completely lacking to establish a connexion between him and Islam."<sup>61</sup> However, there are certain characteristics of South Indian thought from the ninth century onwards which point strongly to Islamic influence, e.g. (1) the increasing emphasis on monotheism; (2) emotional worship; (3) self-surrender (*prapatti*) and adoration of the teacher (*Guru-bhakti*); and in addition, (4) laxity in the rigours of the caste system; and (5) indifference towards mere ritual.<sup>62</sup> The Lingayats and the Siddhars are the best examples of religious communities that arose in South India as a result of early Muslim influence.

From the South the Bhakti movement travelled to the North, and almost all the great religious reformers of the Sultanate and the Mughal periods were in some way or the other influenced by it. Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsidas, Sant Tukaram, Mirabai and several other thinkers and saints preached the emancipation of the human soul or *moksha* through devotion and love and complete dedication to the *guru*. The concepts of the Sufis and their practices like *wisal*, *dhikr*, *pir*, *murshid* and *faqr* can be discerned in the thought and practices of these reformers.

(ii) *Shi'ism in Sind and other parts of India*

It was in Sind that the Fatimid mission, an important sect of the Shi'as, first made its appearance towards the end of the ninth century, and then spread to Multan, Gujerat and the Punjab. It was established in Sind in 883 by one of its missionaries, al-Haytham, the nephew of the Yamanite Da'i Abu 'l-Qasim b. Hawshab Man-sur al-Yaman.<sup>63</sup> The Sumra rulers of Sind, a local Sindhi Hindu tribe, who were converted to Islam at the time of the first Arab conquest of Sind (8th century), had accepted the early Fatimid Isma'ili Da'wa, but after the split of the Da'wa into the Musta'lin Da'wa and the Nizari Isma'ili Da'wa, "drifted away from both the rival Da'was; separating from these Da'was, made themselves quite independent. They just kept up the Fatimid Isma'ili tradition of their forefathers without paying any allegiance to any Da'wa outside."<sup>64</sup> The Sumras frequently inter-married with the Arab settlers, having mixed Arab-Hindu



names. Even after conversion they retained many of their old Hindu customs. They had marriage-relations with big local Arab landowners and had thus acquired great influence and power.<sup>65</sup> Besides Sind, the Fatimid Isma'ili Da'wa spread in other parts of India. The Musta'lin Da'wa of the Yaman controlled their local converts in Gujerat from A.H. 460 up to A.H. 944 when it shifted its headquarters to Gujerat itself. During this period the Yamanites exercised a thorough Arab influence. Its followers adopted Arabic names, literature was written mainly in Arabic, local Hindu traditions were abandoned and the process of arabicisation went very deep. The Nizari Isma'ili tradition of Persia, the other branch of the Fatimid Da'wa, spread in Gujerat, Kashmir and Northern India.<sup>66</sup>

(iii) *Early Inroads of Arab Knowledge and Learning in India*

From the beginning of the eighth up to the end of the ninth century Sind remained under direct Arab rule. Al-Mansura and Multan, the two important political and cultural centres of the Arabs in Sind had lost their importance by the end of the 10th century A.D. In A.D. 980, the Qaramita, an extremist Shi'a sect, captured Multan and had turned it into a seat of their own schismatic propaganda.<sup>67</sup> However, the presence of Arab scholars, religious men and merchants in Sind is attested by several Arab travellers to the region, like al-Mas'udi, Ibn Hauqal, al-Maqdisi and others whose eye-witness accounts throw considerable light on the geography and the social, cultural and religious life of Sind during this period.

Al-Mas'udi describes with great veneration his meeting a descendant of Prophet Muhammad named Hamza, in al-Mansura in about 915-916. He also encountered several members of the family of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and met some descendants of Umar b. 'Ali and those of Muhammad b. 'Ali.<sup>68</sup> Al-Maqdisi speaks of the presence of some scholars in al-Mansura, one of whom was Qadi Abu Muhammad Mansuri, a follower of Imam Da'ud the Zahirite and author of many works.<sup>69</sup> Another authority speaks of Abu Hafs, a *muhaddith* (Specialist in Prophetic Traditions) of Basra, having visited Sind in the early days of the conquest. In Sind, he 'must have been the fountain-head of the narration of *Hadith* (Traditions).<sup>70</sup> However, after its conquest by the Sultans of

Delhi, Sind produced a number of specialists of Islamic sciences and traditions whose names and works are recorded by several authors.<sup>71</sup>

Arab scholars, merchants and travellers also visited other parts of India like Gujerat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Bengal and Assam during this period. But it seems that the visiting Arab scholars were either experts of Islamic sciences like exegesis of the Qur'an, Traditions and Islamic Jurisprudence or they were interested in religious propaganda, like the Isma'ilis, etc. But there is no evidence to show that Arab scientists and philosophers of this period visited India. On the other hand, it seems that Indians were not unaware of the scientific achievements of the Arabs and of the countless scientific and philosophical works produced in Arabic by a galaxy of authors in different parts of the Arab world. Indian scientists and scholars did visit Baghdad and other parts of the 'Abbasid empire. But it is strange that Indian scholars did not profit from the intellectual renaissance taking place at this time in the Arab world. This fact is partly explained by al-Biruni who visited India in the early decades of the 11th century A.D.

(iv) *Al-Biruni on India*

Al-Biruni was one of the first Muslim scientists who visited India in the beginning of the 11th century A.D. He possessed a profound knowledge of Greek, Roman and the ancient Iranian sciences. He came to India to study Indian sciences and learn from Indian wisdom. He not only accomplished this task but rendered a great service to India by presenting faithfully India's ancient cultural and scientific legacy to the Arabic-speaking world of his time through his monumental work on India, entitled *Tahqiq ma li'l-Hind*, etc. Remarking on the growth of an antagonistic attitude in Indians towards foreigners in general and Muslims in particular, he says that one of the reasons was that they had developed a kind of hatred towards Khurasan even before the rise of Islam, for it was from this region and from Fars, Iraq, Mosul and the frontiers of Syria that "Shamanism" (Buddhism) was banished by Zoroastrianism, ultimately taking refuge in the eastern part of Balkh. Later, the invasions of Muhammad b. Qasim through southern Afghanistan, and those of Mahmud of Ghazna, and the loot and annihilation that fol-



lowed, sowed the seeds of hatred towards Islam; even Indian knowledge and learning were banished from the regions conquered by Muslims and took refuge in Kashmir and Banaras where no inimical hand could reach.<sup>72</sup> Among other reasons he points to a basic defect in the Indian character, namely, that they were not prepared to recognize any land, people, kings and sciences except their own to the extent that even if they were informed by any one that scholarship and knowledge existed in Khurasan and Fars, they considered the informer ignorant and did not accept his information as authentic. "If", says al-Biruni, "they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their minds, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is. One of their scholars Varahamihira, in a passage where he calls on the people to honour the Brahmans, says: 'The Greeks, though impure, must be honoured, since they were trained in sciences, and therein excelled others. What, then, are we to say of a Brahman, if he combines with his purity the height of sciences?'"<sup>73</sup>

Al-Biruni's criticism may have been prejudiced but it is frank and straightforward. Indians of the Middle Ages did not fully appreciate the scientific and intellectual achievements of the Arabs of this period. Such an attitude towards science was not only in regard to the Arab sciences. It was present in regard to our own scientific and intellectual progress. Perhaps the reasons for such an attitude towards science should be sought somewhere else besides in mere 'hatred of the foreigners' or in superiority complex. In the opinion of Professor N. V. Banerjee,\* the Indians, due to their excessively poignant concern with the future of man, ignored the need for scientific and material progress, for these were looked upon as mundane and vulgar matters and hence worthy of contempt. So the entire intellectual energies of the great thinkers and the savants were devoted to religious philosophy and to questions pertaining to the soul and *moksha*. This was probably one of the reasons why Indians in the Middle Ages could not make much headway in science as compared to their achievements of the ancient period. As long as Buddhism lasted scientific progress was made, but with the revival of Brahmanism, religious philosophy got the upper hand. Whatever the factors may have been, the fact remains

\*Professor of Philosophy, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla.

that if Indians had continued to devote their attention to the growth and advancement of science in the Middle Ages, India might have noticed an era of scientific and industrial progress.

It was al-Biruni, again, who was perhaps the first scientist to translate Arabic scientific works into Sanskrit. In the words of Sachau, "His work as a translator was a double one. He translated from Sanskrit into Arabic and from Arabic into Sanskrit. He wants to give Muslims an opportunity of studying the sciences of India and on the other hand, he feels called upon to spread Arabic learning among the Hindus."<sup>74</sup> Al-Biruni visited the valley of the Kabul river and Punjab, and Kashmir and Banaras, the two important seats of learning which were out of reach of the Muslims at the time.<sup>75</sup> He learnt the Sanskrit language and endeavoured to collect Sanskrit manuscripts.<sup>76</sup> He had acquired such proficiency in Hindu astronomy that the Indian pandits would not believe that his knowledge was his own, but asked him to tell them the name of the Hindu master from whom he had received such profound knowledge. They declared him to be a sorcerer and called him *the sea and the water which sur-passes vinegar in acidity*.<sup>77</sup> The reputation of al-Biruni seemed to have travelled far and wide in India for some pandits from even "the forbidden land" of Kashmir and other Hindu astronomers posed questions to him which he answered in special treatises.<sup>78</sup>

Al-Biruni translated the following works into Arabic: *Samkhya* by Kapila, the Book of Patanjali, *Paulisasiddhanta*, *Brahmasiddhanta*, both by Brahmagupta, *Brihatsamhita*, *Laghu-jatakam*, the latter two by Varahamihira. He translated into Sanskrit slokas the following books: *Euclid's Elements*, *Ptolemy's Almagest* and a treatise of his own on the construction of the astrolabe. In the opinion of Sachau, he probably dictated the meaning to his pandits and they moulded the words into slokas.<sup>79</sup> Al-Biruni also wrote for a certain Syavabala (?) of Kashmir a canon or a handbook of astronomy in Arabic, called *The Arabian Khanda Khadyaka*.<sup>80</sup> Sachau enumerates twenty-two works by al-Biruni which pertain to Indian subjects like astronomy, mathematics, medicine, etc. As for his work on India, Sachau remarks, "If in our days a man began studying Sanskrit and Hindu learning with all the help afforded by modern literature and science, many a year would pass before he would be able to do justice to the antiquity of India to such an extent and with



such a degree of accuracy as Alberuni has done in his *Indica*.<sup>81</sup> The vernacular used by al-Biruni is more nearly related to Sindhi than to any other modern Neo-Aryan languages of India.<sup>82</sup>

The period of al-Biruni marks the apogee of the growth of Muslim intellectual thought and scientific achievements; at the same time it marks the beginnings of the decline of science and education in the Islamic world and hence the ultimate and universal decadence of Islamic culture and society. It is but proper here, therefore, to discuss some of the factors that led to the intellectual and educational decline of the Muslims of this period.

### *C. Causes of the Decline of Islamic Culture and Society in the Middle Ages*

In his excellent monograph on the *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzali*, 'Umaruddin analyses al-Ghazzali's views on Islamic ethics and education. According to 'Umaruddin, al-Ghazzali was not so much against philosophy or science as against the sceptical outlook which they brought in their train. Again, the philosophical doctrines in themselves were not so dangerous as the corollaries and inferences which began to be drawn from them by the Muslim thinkers of the day. It was for this reason that al-Ghazzali made al-Farabi (d. A.D. 950) and Ibn Sina (d. A.D. 1036) his main targets of criticism for they were the two great masters of Greek philosophy before him. In his view they were unbelievers for they followed the philosophy of Aristotle whose views were "suffused with heresy and unbelief".<sup>83</sup> Al-Ghazzali examined the metaphysical views of the theists among the philosophers and found that three of their various propositions contradicted the beliefs and the teachings of Islam: (1) "that the world existed from eternity"; this being the opposite of the Islamic belief that the world came into existence in time (*huduth*); (2) "that God knew only the universals and not the particulars"; again, a belief contrary to the Islamic one, namely, that God was omniscient; and (3) "that there would be no resurrection of the physical body."<sup>84</sup> Al-Ghazzali's analysis of the metaphysical ideas of the Muslim philosophers and his terse warning to the mathematician and the logician against "the serious error of utilising the fruits of their researches for the examination and evaluation of metaphysical and religious data"<sup>85</sup> once for all con-

demned the philosophers as heretics and unbelievers in the eyes of the more orthodox sections of the society and the Muslims in general. Al-Ghazzali was a great savant and a religious reformer. He is even today regarded as the *imam* by the orthodox Muslim community. His teachings had therefore the force of law. Al-Ghazzali did not however stop at criticizing the Muslim philosophers who followed the Greeks. Being a religious reformer he went a step further. He introduced new meaning into the Muslim educational philosophy of his time. "One should not leave any branch of desirable sciences unstudied, for all of them are related and auxiliary to one another. But one should be clear on the point that the end of '*Ilm al-Mu'amala*' is '*Ilm al-Mukashafa*'. Since one cannot master the whole of every subject, one should acquire that part of a subject which helps in the realization of the ideal. One should at least know the reason why one science is superior to the other."<sup>86</sup> He further emphasized, "What is really binding on man is the knowledge of the method of achieving eternal happiness. It consists of '*ilm al-Mu'amala*', which comprises both knowledge and conduct and '*ilm al-Mukashafa*', i.e. pure knowledge. Man can acquire both but very few are able to attain the latter. So, ethically speaking, '*ilm al-Mu'amala*' is the only science which is *fard 'ayn* (obligatory)."<sup>87</sup> Thus, in his system of education, he emphasized the need for moral and spiritual education for the Muslims and assigned the study of science to a secondary place. Moreover, he classified knowledge as disseminated by Aristotle and his followers into: impious, heretical and atheistic,<sup>88</sup> thereby drawing the attention of the Muslims to the inherent irreligious aspects of Greek learning that was hitherto popular among the Muslims and acquired without any religious or other inhibitions.

Al-Ghazzali's ideas had a far reaching effect. They determined the future course of Muslim education for many centuries to come. With his emphasis on moral education which meant the study of the Islamic theological subjects, his criticism of the Muslim and Greek philosophers and scientists in general and attack on the Greek educational system, the natural and physical sciences like physics, mathematics, chemistry, mechanics, etc. were given secondary importance in the future syllabus of schools and colleges where Muslim children acquired education. The study of Greek sciences became taboo and sci-



entists and scholars became cautious about studying Greek philosophy and other sciences for they were afraid that if they studied these sciences they would be dubbed as heretics, etc. by the orthodox 'ulama. Thus, courses of study became stereotyped and education narrowed down to a few select sciences. As a result, the earlier spirit of free enquiry and investigation which permeated the educational life of the Muslims was lost, resulting in the stagnation and decay of scientific knowledge. Thus, from about the twelfth century until about the nineteenth, we do not find any advance made by Muslims in science and technology, with perhaps a few exceptions like Ulugh Beg (A.D. 1393-1449) in astronomy, Ibn al-Nafis<sup>89</sup> (d. 1288-9) in medicine, etc. But on the whole, it was a period of intellectual stagnation and scientific decline. As a result, the society also suffered materially, for progress in science and technology is always closely related to and results in social and economic progress of human society. Political anarchy, the onslaught of the Mongols against the Arabs and several other social and economic factors were no doubt responsible for the general decay of Islamic society in the Middle Ages, but we cannot overlook the important intellectual struggle between orthodoxy and religious dogmatism on the one hand, and liberalism and free-thought on the other, which dominated Islamic society for several centuries. If knowledge was allowed to be disseminated as freely as during the early centuries of the 'Abbasid period a technological and industrial revolution might have taken place in the Middle East long before it did in Europe. Edward Sachau correctly pointed out, "The fourth century is the turning point in the history of the spirit of Islam, and the establishment of the orthodox faith about 500 sealed the fate of independent research for ever. But for Alash'ari and Alghazzali the Arabs might have been a nation of Galileos, Keplers, and Newtons."<sup>90</sup> As for other factors leading to a decline of the Islamic society sociologically speaking, see the discussion below on 'Islam and the Shari'a Law in India.'

### III. CULTURAL CONTACTS DURING THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

History often offers interesting coincidences. One such was that the long process of cultural exchange between India and the

dynamic early Arab society, in the fields of science and education, religion and philosophy, reached its zenith about the same time that India witnessed the beginnings of the Muslim conquests from the North. Al-Biruni represented the former while Mahmud of Ghazna the latter. Henceforth the basis of Indo-Arab relationship also changed. While there was much mutual give and take in the period preceding the eleventh century, the interplay of cultural influences in the succeeding centuries was confined to Arab or Islamic influences in India. The impetus for this came from the establishment of the Turkish rule in India in the eleventh century. There was a growing Muslim community, mainly through conversion, whose religious and spiritual needs had to be fulfilled. The *Shari'a* or Islamic Law therefore became the basis of the Islamic society and was preached by the *'ulama* and the *muftis*. Every Muslim was religion-bound to practise the *Shari'a* and uphold the cause of Islam. Islamic education which by now had become rigid in its various features was imported with the purpose of producing 'good Muslims' and not so much with the object of producing sound and objective scholars who would serve the cause of knowledge and hence society. The whole edge of this pattern of education, whose origins lay in Baghdad, was directed towards the theological equipment of the student, so that he might become intellectually capable of defending the faith. The few sciences that were taught in this compact educational system also ultimately decayed for there was no scope for originality of thought or experiments. As a result the scientific literature in Arabic produced in India, as also the Persian scientific works, lacked originality and were mainly of the nature of commentaries or super-commentaries on the original works of the early masters.

Secondly, it was from the eleventh century onwards that the Turks, Afghans or the Mughals and not the Arabs became the main instruments of the diffusion of Arab knowledge and education in India and the upholders of the *Shari'a*. While in the northern and central parts of India, Central Asian, Turkish or Iranian social and cultural patterns and customs prevailed, in the South, Arab customs and social behaviour continued to have their impact. The largest number of Arab scholars, merchants and travellers in India during this period visited the South as they had done from very ancient times. The history of Indo-



Arab relations between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries, therefore, is the history of indirect Arab influences in India, whether in the field of *Shari'a*, education or language and literature.

(i) *Arab Educational System Introduced in India*

The pattern of Muslim educational system that was introduced in India by the Ghaznavid Sultans, its structure, syllabi and courses of studies, were originally laid down in Baghdad during the eleventh century A.D. The Nizamiya College founded in A.D. 1065-67 by Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier of the Saljuq Sultans Alp Arslan (1063-72) and Malikshah (1072-9), was a theological seminary founded in Baghdad, particularly for the study of the Shafi'i law and the orthodox Ash'ari system.\* It was Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092) with whom al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) was closely associated and who founded the Nizamiya Colleges not only in Baghdad but in Naysapur, Isfahan and many other centres of Islamic learning. He chalked the syllabi and courses of studies.<sup>1</sup> The Saljuq Sultans vied with the other Muslim Sultans in patronizing such *madrasas* which spread all over Khurasan, Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Muslim world. The large majority of these institutions were devoted to specialized theological studies, e.g. Exegesis of the *Qur'an* (*tafsir*), *Hadith* (Traditions) and to each of the four schools of Islamic Law: Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali.<sup>2</sup>

Sultan Mahmud also founded a *madrasa* at Ghazna and richly endowed it, and when the later Ghaznavids transferred their capital from Ghazna to Lahore, the city became the centre of learning during the Ghaznavid period. "The pattern of education which found its culmination in Ghazni was adopted in Delhi from where it spread all over the country."<sup>3</sup> However, even at this early stage when these institutions were inaugurated in India, the nature and aims of the education imparted through them to the Muslim students, had become rigid and narrow. It was mainly theological with a little sprinkling of secular education and of the study of exact sciences. Yusuf Husain Khan correctly remarks, "These Madrasahs were the strongholds of orthodoxy and were subsidized by the State. They

\*It was here that al-Ghazzali lectured (P. K. Hitti, *H. O. A.*, p. 432).

aimed at stabilizing a body of beliefs and a discipline prescribed by these beliefs, around which the entire social structure revolved."<sup>4</sup>

Among the later Turkish Sultans and Mughal Emperors there were many who loved knowledge and education and patronized learning and learned men, but few out of a galaxy of these monarchs could be termed enlightened for only a few of them tried to introduce reforms in the current education systems. From the time of Iltutmish to the reign of Sikandar Lodhi (d. 1517) "the curriculum of the Madrasahs followed a set pattern. Greater emphasis was laid on theological education (Manqul)"<sup>5</sup> The latter, however, established Madrasahs in all parts of the Kingdom, invited qualified teachers and learned men from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia. He founded Madrasahs at Mathura and Narwar which were "open to all without any discrimination of caste or creed."<sup>6</sup> Among the *'ulama* he invited were two brothers from Multan, Shaykh 'Abd Allah and Shaykh 'Aziz Allah, both specialists in rational sciences (*ma'qulat*). Shaykh 'Abd Allah's influence led to the popularization of these sciences and he produced forty disciples, all specialists in *ma'qulat*. Again, it was during his reign that the Kayasthas took to learning the Persian language and literature.<sup>7</sup> The Mughal Emperors were specially devoted to learning, a tradition which they had inherited from their forefathers. Humayun was a great bibliophile and scholar, and in the Madrasah which he founded in Delhi special provision was made for teaching such rational sciences as mathematics, astronomy and geography, the subjects in which he was personally interested.<sup>8</sup> Akbar, though himself uneducated, took keen interest in education and, at his suggestion, subjects like geometry, astronomy, accountancy, public administration and agriculture were introduced in the courses of study. "This scheme gave a secular bias to the entire educational system of the country"<sup>9</sup> The *A'in-i Akbari* laid down, "Every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, the notation peculiar to arithmetic, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household matters, the rules of government, medicine, logic, the Tabiyi, Riazi and Ilahi sciences and history; all of which may be acquired gradually.

In studying Sanskrit, students ought to learn the Bayakaran Niyai, Bedanta and Patanjali. No one should be allowed to neglect those things which the present time requires."<sup>10</sup>



Akbar's educational policy was greatly influenced by Mir Fathullah Shirazi, a great savant of the time and a man of great genius. He invented many ingenious things, among them a millstone which was placed on a cart and turned itself and ground corn. He also supervised the work of translation of the astronomical tables of Ulugh Beg and also introduced works of 'Allama Dawwani, Sadr Shirazi and Mirza Jan in the curriculum of the Madrasas as optional subjects, thus giving a general bias to *ma'qulat*. He also carried on his experiments in mechanics in the *karkhanas* (workshops) which formed a regular department under the Diwan-e-Buyutat.<sup>11</sup> Another ingenious scientist of Akbar's time was Hakim 'Ali Jilani (1017/1608) a physician attached to the Court of Akbar. He excelled his contemporaries in mathematics and medicine. He constructed a reservoir through which lay the passage to a small room, the door of which was always open but water did not enter the room. The emperor's curiosity led him to dive into the water; he then entered the room which he found well furnished. After coming out of the water, he rewarded the constructor generously.<sup>12</sup>

Akbar's liberal policies in education and introduction of the rational sciences resulted in education becoming popular both among the Muslims and the Hindus. Some of the Hindu scholars excelled in rational sciences and were appointed as teachers in the *madrasas*.<sup>13</sup> Akbar was not unaware of the Renaissance that had taken place in contemporary Europe and of the progress Europe was making in arts and sciences. He sent envoys to foreign countries to bring curiosities from there. He despatched Haji Habibullah and a number of craftsmen with him to Goa to acquire the arts of the Europeans.<sup>14</sup>

The liberal and enlightened educational policies pursued by Akbar were carried forward by his worthy successors, Jahangir and Shahjahan<sup>15</sup> but they were reversed by Aurangzeb, and once again orthodoxy was the order of the day. Although Aurangzeb founded numerous *madrasas* all over the country, his approach in intellectual and cultural spheres was orthodox.<sup>16</sup> During the later Mughal period the courses of study emphasized the rational sciences, with slight modifications from time to time.<sup>17</sup> In the middle of the 18th century, the well-known *Dars-i Nizami* was drawn up by Mulla Nizamuddin with an emphasis on the theolo-

gical sciences, grammar and rhetorics, philosophy, logic and mathematics, but it was essentially based on the previous systems.<sup>13</sup> This system prevailed in India till the second half of the 19th century when reformers like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) emphasized the need of following the modern educational system and founded the Mohommedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh. In the present century, in spite of the popularity of modern education among the Muslims, the *madrasas*-system continues to survive and there are hundreds of such *madrasas* all over India, the well-known among them being the Deoband Madrasa and the Nadwa at Lucknow, where the ancient pattern of Islamic education continues to be followed. In spite of the efforts of certain Muslim reformers to introduce new courses and syllabi, the *madrasas* have changed but little. The Muslim revivalists of today are averse to the introduction of any reforms in these institutions and are opposed to any move to modernize them. The entire Arab world has discarded the medieval methods of education and has taken to modern systems be it British, French, or American and even the most ancient Arab seat of learning in Egypt, the al-Azhar University, has now revolutionized itself, but in India thousands upon thousands of poor Muslim children who cannot afford to go to primary or secondary schools are admitted to these *madrasas* in the name of religious education.

(ii) *Exchange of Arab and Indian Scholars and Religious Leaders*

The establishment of Muslim Kingdoms in the north and in the south and the introduction of the Arab educational system and the *Shari'a* brought in its train a large number of Arab theologians, jurists and men of learning to India throughout the later medieval period. As will be noticed some Indian Muslim scholars also visited the Arab countries and acquired eminent positions in their respective fields of knowledge there.

Lahore became the seat of Islamic learning during the reign of Sultan Mas'ud who had made it a capital of the Ghaznavid dominions east of the Indus, and it was during his reign that Shaykh Muhammad Isma'il (d. 448/1056) the first Traditionist (*Muhaddith*) and Exegesist (*Mufasssir*) entered India and settled down in Lahore.<sup>19</sup> During the reign of Iltutmish, an eminent traditionist and philologist al-Hasan al-Saghani (d. 650 A.H.)



who was born in Lahore, twice acted as the ambassador of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir (1180-1225).<sup>20</sup> During the reign of 'Ala al-Din Khalji, an Egyptian Traditionist Shams al-Din came from Egypt to Multan with the purpose of spreading the study of *Hadith* in India, but although the Sultan was a great patron of scholars the Egyptian scholar found that he neither offered his prayers nor did he visit the Mosque on Fridays. He was greatly disappointed at this and returned to Egypt forthwith after writing a long letter to the Sultan.<sup>21</sup> An Indian scholar, Shaykh Safi al-Din Hindi (d. 1315) went to Yaman and Egypt for higher studies and, later, became well known for his knowledge of Scholastic Theology (*al-Kalam*) and Jurisprudence.<sup>22</sup> The Moroccan globe-trotter Ibn Battuta visited Delhi during the reign of Muhammad b. Tughlaq and acquired the eminent position of a jurist in India. Another scholar belonging to this period, 'Umar b. Ishaq al-Hindi, having acquired his early education in Delhi, went to Egypt for higher studies where he finally rose to the position of *qadi 'l-qudat* (chief judge).<sup>23</sup>

The kingdom of Gujerat attracted a number of Arab scholars. Ahmadabad, after its foundation by Ahmad Shah I, became a great centre of learning. To it came Wajih al-Din Muhammad Maliki upon whom the king conferred the title of "*Malik al-Muhaddithin*" (King of the Traditionists). Ibn al-Damamini, a native of Egypt, came to India and composed some works for Ahmad Shah I. Before the foundation of this Kingdom of Gujerat Muslim pilgrims to Mecca took the land route in preference to the sea-route, but after the power of the Kingdom spread up to the sea-coast the Kings organized pilgrim voyages by sea. Thus a number of Arab scholars were attracted to this Kingdom and to the Deccan.<sup>24</sup> The Arab scholars of Surat and Maha'im (suburb of Bombay) enjoyed the patronage of the Bahmani Kingdom of the south as for sometime the Bahmanis' sway extended to the Arabian sea.<sup>25</sup>

Of the Muslim Kingdoms of South India, those that attracted the Arab scholars most were the Adil Shahi Kingdom of Bijapur, the Qutb Shahi Kingdom of Golkunda and the Nizam Shahi Kingdom of Ahmadnagar. Among the scholars who visited Bijapur was one Hasan b. Ali Shadqam (d. 1636) who was attached to the court. He was an author and a poet. Another scholar of repute was Zayn al-Din al-Ma'bari, who dedicated his work

*Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* to Ali Adil Shah. Ibn Ma'sum and his father, the author of *Sulafat al-'Asr*, visited the court of the Qutb Shahis. Similarly, Ahmadnagar also attracted many Arab scholars.<sup>26</sup>

The Mughals seemed to have attracted a smaller number of Arab scholars to their court than did the Muslim Kings of the South, yet theirs was the most important and glorious period in respect of the output of Arabic literature and of the Islamic and exact sciences in Arabic language. It has been termed by Zubaid Ahmad as 'the golden age of Muslim India' from the point of view of Arabic authorship.<sup>27</sup>

(iii) *Guru Nanak's Visit to Mecca and Baghdad*

According to a Sikh religious tradition<sup>28</sup>, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is said to have visited Arabia and Iraq. His "pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina" formed the last long journey that he performed; he is also said to have visited Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> In Mecca, he is reported to have had long polemics with Makhdum Rukn al-Din Abu 'l-Fath Jalal Thani, a Sayyid belonging to the family of 'Ali Naqi and with some Muslim pilgrims from India among whom Jivan Shah and Pir Patanwala Shaykh Ibrahim are mentioned.<sup>30</sup> In Baghdad, he had long religious discourses with the 'sajjada nashin' (spiritual successor) to 'Pir Hazrat Dastagir' i.e. Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir b. Abd Allah al-Jili (al-Jilani), (d. A.D. 1166) on questions like the religious and spiritual significance of music, on heavens and earths, metempsychosis, etc.<sup>31</sup> According to these traditions, Guru Nanak is said to have performed some miracles in Mecca and Baghdad and impressed Arab audiences with his learned sermons and spiritual powers. That Guru Nanak should have visited the religious centres and Sufi shrines of the Islamic world of his time was an indication of his sincere desire to bring about a synthesis between the two leading religions of India of the time, namely, Hinduism and Islam. How far Sikhism represents a syncretic form of the two is a subject for objective and scholarly study.

(iv) *Growth of Arabic Literature in India*

The study of Arabic language and literature, the traditional Islamic and the rational sciences inherited from the Arabs, resulted in the production of a vast amount of Arabic literature



in India.<sup>32</sup> An important feature of this literature when viewed as a whole is that the majority of the works pertained to the traditional Islamic sciences, scholasticism or theology, and although they lacked originality, they continued to exercise the same legal force in the world of Islam outside India as they did in India.<sup>33</sup> But departure from traditionalism, any new thought or fresh interpretation especially in the case of the *Shari'a*, was avoided rendering the entire literature a series of commentaries, glossaries and explanatory works. This was because the freedom of interpretation or speculative thought (*ijtihad*) had long since ceased to exist.

As for other sciences like philosophy, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, etc. the perennial fear of being charged by the *'ulama* as 'heretics' or 'free-thinkers' if they studied Greek philosophy or other sciences for the sake of knowledge, led the scholars and scientists to tread the path of knowledge cautiously. Such an attitude must have also prevented the vast amount of original Arabic scientific works belonging to the earlier periods from percolating into the Indian academic circles. Thus, even those Hellenic-Arabic sciences which were introduced as part of the syllabi could not grow and scientific thought as a whole was petrified.

### THEOLOGY

Zubaid Ahmad points out the strict similarity between the Arabic literature produced in India and that produced outside India and the reliability and authenticity of such literature by the Muslims all over the world. But the common feature was the lack of originality. In *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), for example, slight differences, corresponding to the ancient customs and usages of a country, find no place, and are accommodated in the legal statutes framed by the State.<sup>34</sup> The *fatwas* "for the settlement of new problems" were always based upon the old authorities. Many works under this title were produced, but the most important was the *Fatawa Almagiri*.<sup>35</sup> Muhibb Allah Bihari's work *Musallam al-Thabut* was "second only to the early standard works" on *usul-i fiqh*.<sup>36</sup> In *Hadith*, "the only work left for the later generations was to arrange and rearrange them in different ways and to compose commentaries upon them."<sup>37</sup> India

Shihab al-Din is arranged on "original lines" in its plan and style. In rhetorics, "new figures of speech were invented by Amir Khusrav and Azad, who also introduced some Sanskrit literary devices into Arabic literature".<sup>44</sup> In linguistics, Indian writers took "greater pains in elucidating the linguistic difficulties of Arabic literature than the people of any Arabic speaking country".<sup>45</sup>

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

As against the enormous amount of Arabic historical writings produced in the Arab world throughout the Middle Ages, India produced a very meagre number of historical works in Arabic. The reason was obvious. Persian had far superseded Arabic in this field in India as it did in *belles-lettres* also. In fact most of the historians who wrote in Arabic were either Indians who lived in Arabia or Arabs who had settled down in India. One of the authors, Qutb al-Din Ahmad al-Nahrwali, was born in Mecca where his father 'Ala al-Din Ahmad had migrated from his native place Nahrwala (Patan, Gujerat). Qutb al-Din Ahmad rose to the position of a *mufti* in Mecca and died in 990/1582. He wrote a history of Mecca *Al-I'tlam bi Alam Bayt Allah al-Haram*,<sup>46</sup> and it is from his other work on the contemporary history of Yemen, entitled *al-Baq al-Yamani fil-Fath al-Uthmani*, that we learn that it was Shihab al-Din Ahmad b. Majid, the greatest Arab navigator of the Middle Ages, who had piloted the boat of Vasco da Gama from Malindi (East Coast of Africa) to Calicut in India in A.D. 1489. Another historian, 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Nahrwali al-Asafi Ulugh Khani, better known as Hajji Dabir was born in Mecca in about 946/1540. He wrote *Zafar al-Walith bi-Muzaffar wa Alih*, being a history of Gujerat. He came to India as a boy of sixteen in 962/1555 and three years later joined the service of Muhammad Ulugh Khan the Abyssinian, a prominent noble and general in Gujerat serving 'Imad al-Mulk. When Akbar entered Ahmadabad, Ulugh Khan became a prisoner, and in the following year Hajji Dabir was appointed to carry the *wagf-money* from Gujerat to Mecca and Medina. In 983/1575 he returned to India and joined the services, first of Sayf al-Mulk, a nobleman of Gujerat, and later of Faujad



produced works of this nature in abundance, e.g. *Kanz al-'Ummal*, *Musawwa*, etc. In commentaries on the *Qur'an* the originality was confined to style alone for after the compilation of the Traditions, there was no special demand for original commentaries. Among the examples of style are *Sawwat' al-Ihām* in which dotted letters have been throughout avoided, and *Jubh Shagab* in which dotted letters only have been used.<sup>33</sup>

#### ILM AL-KALAM

One of the sciences in which Arabic literature was rich and which the Arab theologians and philosophers had perfected was Scholastic Theology (*Ilm al-Kalam*). It grew as a result of the study of Greek philosophy by the Muslims and the application of the same to the philosophical problems of theology. By the time it reached India, it had already developed into a highly skilled science to explain the religion. Great names like those of al-Ash'ari (d. 935-6), al-Ghazzali and others were already known to the Islamic world. It made some progress in India and in the later centuries produced great thinkers like Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702-1762) whose work entitled *Hujjat Allah al-Baligha* "contains a considerable amount of originality, and its merits have been duly recognized by Muslim scholars in other countries also".<sup>34</sup> Shah Wali Allah did not write any book explaining the Islamic injunctions in the true spirit of scholastic theology.<sup>35</sup> Sir Hamilton Gibb counts him among those outstanding figures of the Islamic world who "strove to restate the bases of Islamic theology in a manner which broke away from the formalism of the orthodox manuals and laid new stress upon the psychological and ethical elements in religion".<sup>36</sup>

#### BELLES-LETTRES

In this branch India did not produce much by way of original and creative literature. However, several Indians did attempt to write prose and poetry in Arabic. Among the outstanding writers was Ghulam Ali Azad. He left behind seven *divans* in Arabic, "possessed of distinguished characteristics".<sup>37</sup> In lexicography, works of great importance like *U'bab*, *Taj al-'Arus*, etc. were produced by Indians. In grammar, *Irshad*, by

Khan of Khandesh.<sup>46\*</sup> Another historian, Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-'Aydarus of Ahmadabad, belonged to the noble family of 'Aydarus of Yemen. His father came to India in 958/1551 and settled in Ahmadabad where 'Abd al-Qadir was born of an Indian slave-girl presented to his father by some of his disciples. He was a distinguished Sufi and an eminent scholar. One of his works *al-Nur al-Safir 'an Akhbar al-Qarn al-'Ashir*, is an important work dealing with biographical accounts and social and political events of the 10th century A.H. (16th-17th century A.D.).<sup>47</sup> Another historian who was of Arabian origin was Al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Shadqam, the author of *Zahr al-Riyad wa Zulal al-Hiyad*. He was an Arab born in Mecca, but in his youth he travelled to India and joined the service of the Nizam Shahi House of Ahmednagar. He was married to one of the princesses of the family.<sup>48</sup> No student of the history of Indo-Arab relations can afford not to read Sayyid Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami's (d. 1200/1785) work on India, entitled *Subhat al-Marjan fi Athar Hindustan*, dealing with the excellence of India in the Exegeses and *Hadith* literature, rhetorics, prose and poetry and "on love, from both the Indian and the Arabian point of view".<sup>49</sup>

(v) *Arabic Language and its Impact on India*

The impact of Arabic on India has been of a dual nature: religious and linguistic. To the Muslims of India, and specially for the more religious-minded among them, it was in the medieval period — as it is to-day — a sacred language since the *Qur'an* was revealed in Arabic. It is considered irreligious to read the *Qur'an* in translation. Hence, translations of the *Qur'an* unaccompanied by the Arabic text have been considered 'innovations' and have never become popular in India. Reciting the *Qur'an* in Arabic alone brings 'blessings' to the reciter. Although Arabic never acquired the status of a mother-tongue in any part of India, for centuries a large majority of the Muslims of India have read the *Qur'an* without understanding its meaning, except for those few who mastered the Arabic language or took pains to read the Urdu or other translations accompanying the Arabic text. The practice of the Muslims of India, however, is contrary to the spirit and the teachings of the *Qur'an* which exhorts every Muslim to read it slowly and carefully so as to be able to follow its meaning. Linguistically, the influence of Arabic on Indian languages



has been of two kinds. Firstly, the vocabulary and certain grammatical forms of some of the indigenous languages of India like Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi, Bengali and Sindhi, have been affected by the Arabic vocabulary and grammatical forms, *e.g.*, nouns, adjectives, singulars and plurals, and masculine and feminine genders. Secondly, the Arabic script was adopted by some of the Indian languages in the medieval period and in the case of some of these languages it still continues to be in vogue. Among the languages which fully adopted the Arabic script giving up their old form is Sindhi. The script continued to be in use from the medieval times until quite recently. To-day, opinion among the Sindhis is divided between those who favour the retention of the Arabic script and those who wish to replace it by the Devanagari script.<sup>50</sup> Sindhi is one of the best examples of an Indian language which carries a definite impress of Arabic. Although it did not accept the influence of Arabic in grammar or syntax, many common words of daily use are of Arabic origin.

The Arabic script was also adopted for Gujerati by the Gujerati-speaking Isma'ili community of Gujerat. But it was mainly restricted to Isma'ili literature in Gujerati. In this case many religious terms and phrases were borrowed from Arabic and freely used in the missionary literature produced in abundance over the centuries in India. This literature has great historical and religious value for the community. Gujerati in the Arabic script is still written and used as means of communication by some members of the Bohra community of Bombay and Gujerat.

In Malabar, the Maplas have studied and cherished the Arabic language for centuries. Malayalam was once written by them in the Arabic script. A number of works written in this script and dealing with the history of the people are extant. The Malabari Muslim pronounces Arabic in exactly the same way as an Arab does. In the Tamil-speaking area in the South, where Arab influence was introduced through traders, the language of the people, namely Tamil, assimilated some Arabic words, which now form a part of the language. Even before the rise of Islam, the Tamil language had already been influenced through Arab contact. Words like *sukkan* and *malumi* represent the Arabic *sukkan* (rudder) and *mu'allim* (captain of a ship). The Arabic script is also used for the religious literature of the Muslims and this language is called 'Arab-Tamil'.<sup>51</sup>

(vi) *The Shari'a (Islamic Law) in India*

The *Shari'a* (Islamic Law) found a footing in India towards the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The advent of the Turks in India and the gradual spread of Islam in the country made it incumbent upon the Sultans and the faithful alike to follow and practise the Law that regulated practically every aspect of their lives. The *Shari'a*, according to the belief of the Muslims, was divinely ordained and revealed to Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Qur'anic verses for the guidance of humanity, in the same manner as the previous divine laws had been revealed to the other Semitic Prophets like Moses and Jesus Christ, before him. It was "the right path" (*sirat al-mustaqim*) revealed to man at a time when the community had gone astray and become misguided. It was "the divine light" which if followed would lead to salvation and eternal bliss.

Between the time it was first implemented in Medina, after the Prophet's migration to that town from Mecca in A.D. 622, and its introduction in India, the *Shari'a* had passed through several stages of development. It was mainly based on the *Qur'an* and *hadith* (Traditions of the Prophet) and later developed on the basis of *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma'* (consensus of opinion among jurists). But by about the tenth century, the different legal schools of thought had come into existence. Among the Sunnis several schools developed but four among these, namely those of Abu Hanifa (d. 766), Malik b. Anas (d. 795), al-Shafi'i (d. 820) and Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855), became widely accepted. Of these, largely the Hanafi School and to a certain extent, the Shafi'i School became popular among the Sunnis of India. The basis of the growth of these schools was the difference in the exposition and interpretation of the verses of the *Qur'an* and of the Traditions attributed to the Prophet, among these early Arab jurists of Islam. This process of growth came to a standstill when, by a consensus of opinion among the learned jurists, it was agreed that no further elaboration or interpretation of the texts was possible as all possible interpretations had been exhausted. In other words, there was no further scope for speculative thought. The Gates of *Ijtihad* were henceforward closed. It was after this stage in the history of Islamic Law that it was introduced in India by the Turkish Sultans. The *Shari'a* had by this time become rigid and non-flexible in form.



In the growth of the *Shari'a* in India, two important factors have been constantly at work. In the first place, it was introduced here by non-Arabs. The Turks were ardent followers of the faith and as Muslims regarded it their duty to enforce the *Shari'a* in the land they ruled. The later rulers, the Afghans and the Mughals and other Muslim rulers of India, all looked at the *Shari'a* more or less from the same angle.<sup>53</sup> The Muslim rulers evolved over the centuries a remarkably elaborate and complex system of judiciary and administered justice in accordance with the laws of the *Shari'a*. They applied the Canon Law to their Muslim subjects; but the Criminal Law was applied to the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike.<sup>54</sup> Administration of justice was the prerogative of the judges of the courts and the judiciary was independent of the executive authority and subordinate to none. Even the king was subjected to the decision of the courts of the *qadis*. The latter were assisted in their day to day work by the *muftis* (jurisconsults) who were in the position of legal assessors and prepared legal opinions on points of law arising out of cases before the *qadis*. These opinions (*fatwas*) were formed on the basis of a study of the texts and did not in any way constitute a departure from the traditional viewpoints of the early jurists. Neither the *qadis* nor the *muftis* were therefore legislators of law.

The second factor was that the *Shari'a* was applied to a land which was different from the land of its origin and to a people who were culturally different and possessed a rich and varied legacy of ancient customs and traditions. Thus, the effect produced by the impact of the *Shari'a* on the new community was the growth of new customs and traditions. While on the one hand, the *Shari'a* changed the life of the new Muslims and presented them with a new philosophy and outlook on life, on the other, their ancient customs and traditions were carried with them into Indian Islam, thus enriching it and creating special features which were Indian. It was for this reason that '*urf* (customs) were recognised as "one of the roots of the Fiqh or Muslim jurisprudence".<sup>55</sup>

For the Muslims, the *Shari'a* was an all-embracing and comprehensive code that governed and regulated practically every aspect of their life. In time, however, it got transformed and notable changes occurred in the Islamic Criminal Law in India,

until finally, it was replaced by the British laws in the nineteenth century. The civil law remained comparatively static and took the form of Muhammadan Law as applied in India to-day.

Offences according to Islamic theology were categorized into: those that were committed against "the rights of God" (*huquq Allah*) and those that violated the "rights of men" (*huquq al-'ibad*). The ruler's first duty was towards God to purge this world of sin, and then towards his subjects who suffered consequence of the act complained of. Punishments accordingly carried: (1) The *Hadd* sentence which was fixed and unalterable was applied in cases of theft or robbery, whoredom, apostasy, drunkenness, and defamation (*ittiham-i zina*). (2) *Ta'zir* (prohibition) did not apply to cases covered by *Hadd* and the courts were free to invent new punishments. Crimes like counterfeiting coins, causing hurt, gambling, committing minor theft, etc. came under this category. (3) In *Qisas* 'the rights of God's creatures prevailed', and hence it was not part of the State's duty to prosecute. The Courts had a discretion to allow homicide cases to be compounded. Treason (*ghadr*) was an offence against God and religion and hence came under 'Canon Law'. The State also utilized emergency powers against rebels, for they were treated as enemies and as theoretically belonging to the domain of war (*dar al-harb*).<sup>56</sup> Islamic Criminal Law, however, passed through a certain amount of change introduced by the Sultans and the Mughal Emperors, especially in the mode of punishments recommended by the *Shari'a*. For instance, Firoz Tughluq modified the *Ta'zir* punishments prescribed by the *Shari'a* and introduced the rudiments of a Code of Law.<sup>57</sup> Cutting of hands was not recommended by Aurangzeb,<sup>58</sup> who also introduced an element of leniency in punishment; a first offender was to be treated leniently. Among the legal reforms introduced by him were: 'remand' by the court to police custody; a form of Habeas Corpus; and appointment of *Diwan-i Mazalim* on the pattern of the 'Abbasid courts of Baghdad, "to redress wrongs".<sup>59</sup> However, the guiding principles in all judgments of the courts of the *qadis* of the Sultanate and the Mughal periods was "justice and good conscience."

After over six centuries of its application in India, the Islamic Criminal Law was finally replaced in 1862, when the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure came



into force. Similarly, the Islamic law of evidence (*Hanafi*) also ceased to exist in India with the passing of the Evidence Act in 1872.<sup>60</sup>

However, the personal law of the *Shari'a* continues to be applied to the Muslims of India and with the passing of the *Shari'at* Act, 1937 an element of uniformity has been introduced in its application. The Act applies to any one and every one who by denomination is a Muslim. In the past "certain portions of the law were abolished, such as slavery and forfeiture of rights on apostasy", but by and large to-day, "the Muhammadan law of Marriage, Divorce, Dower, Legitimacy, Guardianship, Gifts, *Wakfs*, Wills, and Inheritance is applied to Muslims everywhere in India".<sup>61</sup> In the words of one of the leading experts of the subject, Mr. Fyzee: "... Muhammadan law, as received in India, is the *Shari'at*, modified by the principles of the English common law and equity, in the varying social and cultural conditions of India; and during the centuries, it has tended to become a discrete system, somewhat at variance with its original sources."<sup>62</sup>

Since Independence, the Muhammadan Law has not gone through any change of a fundamental importance. There is every reason to believe that the law as it stands to-day and as practised by the Muslims, requires new enactments in its certain aspects, e.g., Marriages and Divorce. But any move towards change is firmly resisted by the orthodox '*ulama*' of India who argue that till a consensus of opinion (*ijma'*) among the '*ulama*' is reached on this point, no change can be introduced. In fact, the reason behind such an attitude is that they are *not* in favour of any such new enactment as might contradict or be different from the laws of the four traditional schools already in force. Their stand as such is the stand of the traditionalists, who are opposed to *ijtihad* or speculative thought with regard to the *Shari'a*. But the fact remains that Muhammadan Law which is primarily based on medieval legal texts like the *Hidaya* and the *Fatawa 'Alamgiri'*<sup>63</sup> needs to be reformulated and reformed. The social progress of the Muslim community in India is largely dependent upon this factor. If the medieval jurists and law-makers of India could apply the principle of 'justice and good conscience' and if large portions of the *Shari'a* can be dispensed with in India, one fails to understand the attitude of the orthodox sec-

tions among the Muslims with regard to new enactments in Muhammadan Law. The crux of the problem, however, is that Islam has never witnessed a religious reformation since the twelfth century up to the present time; radical ideas of some Muslim theologians even in the past, like Shah Wali Allah, on the question of *ijtihad*, have gone unheeded in India. The *Shari'a* is confused with the faith itself in the orthodox circles. Separation of religion from law is the only solution.

#### *The four schools of the Sunnis*

Of the four main schools of the Sunnis, namely, Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali, the first two alone became popular among the Indian Muslims. The Maliki and the Hanbali schools seemed never to have flourished on Indian soil. One of the contributory factors towards the general acceptance of the Hanafi school, as compared to the other three, was that the majority of the Muslim rulers from the Turks down to the Mughals followed it. The Hanafi law was sponsored by the Mughals and administered by the *qadis*. The popularity of the Shafi'i law along the coastal regions of South India (Konkan, Malabar, etc.) was not probably so much due to political reasons as to the stay of many Arab Shafi'i '*ulama* in these regions. The large Arab merchant communities hailing from Basra, Baghdad, Siraf and Oman and different regions of South Arabia like the Yemen or Hadramaut, or from Egypt who settled down along the eastern and the western coasts of peninsular India seemed to have followed the Shafi'i school from very early days.

#### *Ithna 'Asharis and the Isma'ilis*

Besides the Sunni Schools, India had its share of the Islamic schismatics, e.g. Ithna 'Ashari Shi'as and the Isma'ilis. The influence of the Ithna 'Ashari or the Twelvers was introduced mainly through Safavid Iran with the return of Emperor Humayun from that country. The Shi'i element formed a strong political force since then and Shi'ism found its pockets in India wherever Shi'i officers of the Imperial establishment found their stronghold. To-day it is a scattered community chiefly located in Uttar Pradesh with Lucknow as its main centre. In spite of the existing institution of *Mujtahids*, their legal position is no different from the Sunnis, except that the courts will apply Shi'a law to them which



again has remained as static as the Sunni law, and this in spite of the few guarded reforms introduced by Raza Shah in the shape of Civil Code in Iran in the twenties.

The Isma'ilis, especially 'western', have more Arab connections than the Twelver Shi'is. We hear of early Isma'ili establishments in Sind and the Punjab. The small principalities of Lahore and Mansura kept their contact with the Egyptian Isma'ili ruler Mu'izz li-dinillah in the tenth century. However, these principalities fell first victims to the Ghaznavid attacks and were almost wiped out. The second Isma'ili advent was in the shape of missionaries from Yemen in the twelfth century. They won a number of adherents in the western coast of Gujarat and to-day, the Isma'ilis, western or eastern, *i.e.* Bohras and Khojas, are mostly located in Gujarat. Their law mostly depends upon the legal compendiums that were compiled during the time of the Fatimids in North Africa and Egypt. The most authentic source being *Da'a'im al-Islam* by Qadi Nu'man,<sup>64</sup> a noted *Qadi* of the time of the first four Fatimid Caliphs. The Isma'ili law as enunciated in this work is applied to the Isma'ilis now.

#### (vii) Arab Social and Cultural Impact

As a result of the long process of intermixture and the imperceptible forces of cultural exchange between the Indians and the Arabs living in India since the Middle Ages, Arab customs and habits in food and dress, and their religious and social traditions have affected the life of the Muslims specially those living in the western and southern parts of India. The Muslims of these regions, many of whom are of Arab origin, can be distinguished from those of the north in their social and cultural behaviour and psychology. While the southern and western parts of India were deeply influenced by Arab culture and civilization, northern and central India came under the direct cultural influence of Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan. Even though this cultural distinction between the north and the south has been continuously present within each linguistic and cultural region of India the Muslims living in those regions have retained their regional characteristics and cultural pattern. Thus, a Muslim from Malabar is in many ways different from a Muslim of Gujarat or Bengal, *e.g.* in food habits, dress, language, etc. The only

common factor that one may find between them and which gives them a sense of unity is the common religion they profess, namely, Islam.

#### IV. THE IMPACT OF MODERN ARAB REFORMIST AND REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS

##### (i) *The Wahhabi Movement*

It is of great significance that Saudi Arabia, where Islam originated towards the beginning of the seventh century, once again produced a powerful religio-political movement in the form of Wahhabism towards the middle of the eighteenth century which exercised considerable influence on the Muslims of India over the centuries. In about the year 1744, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab, who belonged to Central Arabia, is said to have started a "revivalist campaign based on the puritan Hanbalite school and the anti-Sufi polemic of Ibn Taimiya and his followers in the fourteenth century."<sup>1</sup> Islam, by this time, had become completely degenerate. Dogmatism and traditionalism, cultivated by the orthodox leaders of the religion from the twelfth century onward, pervaded the religious, social and political life of the people. Any move towards reform, and these were few and far between, was construed as *ilhad* (heresy) or *kufr* (non-belief), and the out-dated and static theological concepts were ever-useful in pronouncing judgment against any one who 'committed this sin'. The educational system of the time further helped to create a narrow outlook among the Muslims and encouraged obscurantist ideas. It was, besides, an age of complacency and glorification of past achievements. Sufism, which had grown into different orders (*silsilas*) since the twelfth century, had also degenerated into soulless sets of rituals which were mechanically followed by the adherents. The popular forms of Sufi practices included tomb-worship, musical gatherings and ecstatic practices of all varieties. No wonder therefore that the urge to return to 'pure' Islam and to follow its 'fundamental' teachings, should have appeared at this time when the social and cultural state of the society was at its lowest ebb.

But some of the immediate causes of these revivalist movements, and of the general reawakening of the Arab world, may also be sought in the political conditions as they existed at the



time. The long feudal, militarist rule of the Ottoman Turks over the Arabs and other Islamic and non-Islamic communities of West Asia, North Africa and Eastern Europe had been responsible for creating a barrier between Western Europe on the one hand and the subjects of the Ottoman Empire on the other. Due to various political factors and economic reasons, there was no scope for the Ottoman subjects to have any cultural or intellectual contacts with Western Europe which had gone through the Renaissance and Religious Reformation and was at this time passing through an Industrial Revolution. Thus, while Europe advanced in every respect, the Islamic society remained backward and tied to traditionalism, a legacy inherited from the early Middle Ages. By the eighteenth century signs of political and military weakness had become manifest in the Ottoman Empire, and it was not until the eighteenth century when they suffered heavy defeat against the Russians that they accepted their weak position in international politics. This consciousness was followed by successive military reforms in the subsequent centuries. Thus, even though there is no direct evidence to show that the Wahhabi movement in Najd appeared as a reaction to the political set-backs suffered by the Ottomans at the hand of the Europeans, at this stage of history it is quite significant. But, Sir Hamilton Gibb observes, "The history of Islam in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a history of revival and efforts at readjustment under the double stimulus of challenge from within and pressing dangers from without."<sup>2</sup> Again: "In the eyes of most Muslims and almost all Westerners, the external pressures arising from the political and economic expansion of Western Europe loom much larger than the internal challenge. But the latter came first and from the heart of the Muslim society."<sup>3</sup> In fact, however, the external challenge of the political and economic expansion of Western Europe may have actually been felt first, giving rise to such movements as that of Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab.

This period also saw the beginnings of the political disintegration of the Mughal Empire in India. The last Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, died in 1703. We notice similar efforts at religious reforms and revivals in India during this period. The most important of these was the one initiated by Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (born in 1703) who is described as "the bridge between medieval and modern Islam in India."<sup>4</sup> His father Shah 'Abd al-

Rahim was one of the compilers of *Fatawa-i-'Alamgiri* which was prepared under the orders of Aurangzeb. Shah Wali Allah came under the influence of the Arab scholars of Hijaz like Shaykh Abu Tahir Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Kurdi under whom he studied *Hadith* at Medina, Shaykh Sulayman al-Maghribi who lectured to him on Maliki Law and other Arab scholars like Shaykh al-Sanawi and Taj al-Din al-Hanafi.<sup>5</sup> It was at this time that Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab was also studying in these holy cities and "perhaps among others with these very teachers."<sup>6</sup> The two systems propounded by these two reformers "had the same source of inspiration, going back through the tradition of the study of *Hadith* in unmythical Hijaz to the orthodox discipline of Ibn Taimiya, and though it is difficult to establish any theory of mutual influence of either on the other, their two systems did come closer, if not actually merge, in the Indian Islam of the nineteenth century."<sup>7</sup> The common feature of both was, however, the purification of Islam from the 'un-Islamic' practices and beliefs that had crept into the life and thought of the Muslims over the centuries. It was therefore essential to present anew to the contemporary decadent Islamic society the original message of Islam as it was first conveyed by the Prophet. It was believed that practice of the original Islam by the Muslims alone can deliver them from their miserable plight. But the basic difference between the two movements seemed to have been that while the Wahhabis stood "for the return to pure monotheism of the early Muslim church"<sup>8</sup> Shah Wali Allah's main objective was to "restore the solidarity of the *umma* by emphasizing a formula of compromise based on whatever was commonly accepted by the various sects of Islam, and by force of conciliatory logic to blur the dividing line between the mystic and the theologian, between the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite, but even more specially between the four orthodox schools of law in Sunni Islam."<sup>9</sup> Shah Wali Allah was not satisfied with this alone. He visualized an ideal Islamic society wherein the Muslims would have political hegemony and for this reason preached *jihad* (holy war) against the 'usurpers of Muslim power' in India. Unfortunately, of all his ideas this alone came to be implemented by some of his followers in the later period. The ideal of a reunited *umma* remains an unfulfilled objective even to-day, even though this alone seemed to have been the only practical idea put forward by him. But the utopia of an ideal



Islamic state did more harm than good to the relations between the Muslims and other communities of India during the nineteenth century. Nowhere in the world does there exist a state of Shah Wali Allah's conception.

An important follower of Shah Wali Allah who put his political theories into practice was Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786-1831). He was a disciple of Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz (1746-1823), the son of Shah Wali Allah. In the course of his visit to Mecca, Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi "must have gained fuller knowledge of the Wahhabis, the puritan sect that had been in control of the Holy Places some years earlier, and their teachings undoubtedly strengthened his resolve to carry on *jihad* against the Sikhs."<sup>10</sup> The military movement led by him in India aimed at establishing a pure Islamic government probably of the Wahhabi type, through which the ideas of Shah Wali Allah could be enforced. He was successful in gaining control of Peshawar with the backing of the local Pathan chieftains, but his ambition of setting up "an Islamic system of government" there was resisted by the tribal chiefs for they feared the weakening of their own authority over the tribes if such a plan was implemented. So they revolted against him and in consequence he had to abandon his plans. Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi was finally killed in an encounter against the Sikhs at Balakot in 1831.<sup>11</sup> However, the full impact of the ideas and activities of Sayyid Ahmad on the Muslims of India during the nineteenth century can be comprehended only when a detailed study of the activities of his disciples and of the subsidiary movements arising as a result of the influence of his political views is completed. One such example was the sect of the Maulavis established by Mir Nasir 'Ali (Titu Mir) of Bengal, in the district of Jessore and Nadiya in Central Bengal, the main object of whose agitation was "the rejection of all Hindu rites"<sup>12</sup> that had become a part of the Muslim religious practices.

During the nineteenth century Bengal witnessed some of the most important Muslim revivalist movements. Among these was the one led by Haji Shari'at Allah (d. 1830). Having lived in Mecca for twenty years, he was influenced by the doctrines of Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab<sup>13</sup> and, on his return to Bengal, began propagating his ideas among the Muslims of the province. Like the Wahhabis he was against the "prevalent procedure of the Sufi initiation." His followers came to be known as the Fara'idis

although they preferred the term 'tawbar Muslims' to be applied to themselves. The movement spread among the Muslim peasantry of Bengal but the extreme religio-political views held by its followers ultimately led to its own extinction. The Fara'idis refused to offer 'Id and Friday prayers in congregation in the mosques. The argument was that having come under British political rule, India had ceased to be a *Dar al-Islam* (the Domain of Islam) which it was during the Mughal political supremacy. It had now, according to Islamic political theory, turned into a *Dar al-Harb* (the Domain of War) where it became incumbent upon every Muslim to wage a holy war against the non-Muslim rulers. Thus, offering prayers in congregation was, from the Islamic point of view, unlawful because the name of an infidel ruler could not be recited in the address (*khutba*) of the *Imam* leading the Friday prayers. This was only possible in a state that was Islamic. So they boycotted the Friday and the 'Id prayers altogether. After the death of Haji Shari'at Allah, the movement was led by his son Haji Muhammad Muhsin or Dudhu Miyan (d. 1860). The latter went a step further. He compelled Bengali Muslim peasants to join his sect and if they refused to do so, they were punished and excommunicated and their crops were destroyed.\* The extremism of the Fara'idis was diluted by Maulavi Karamat 'Ali, a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi. Although he shared their abhorrence of the un-Islamic practices which they felt had crept into the Islamic society of Bengal, he was strongly opposed to their rejection of the 'Id and the Friday prayers and to their treatment of other Muslims as *kafirs* (infidels). He held that if non-Muslims conquered Muslim lands "observances of Friday prayers and the celebration of two *ids* was not only lawful but obligatory." In this view of his he was supported by the Arab '*ulama* of Hijaz.<sup>14</sup>

Even though there may not have been any direct influence of Wahhabism on some of these religio-political movements of India like the one led by Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi, there was remarkable similarity of approach, aims and activities between the movement

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\*Ikram, *H.M.C.I. & P.*, pp. 402-3. Wudud Miyan preached that "all land belonged to God and should be owned by cultivators without any obligation to pay taxes to the landlord or to the government. He organised parallel religious courts for the Muslims, etc." (Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 216).



of the Wahhabis of Arabia and that of Bareilvi in India. Such concepts like the establishment of a pure Islamic state or return to pure Islam are not uncommon in our own times and may be observed in the aims and objects of certain religio-political parties of India, Pakistan, Indonesia and many of the Arab countries, notably in the manifestos of the Jama'at-i Islami and the Ikhwan al-Muslimun. Indeed, by virtue of their being revivalist and extremist in character they join hands with the reactionary forces of the world and thus act as instruments of reaction coming in the way of the progress of the Muslims.

Important though the Wahhabi movement of Arabia was from a religious point of view, it was basically a political movement as its subsequent history has proved. It aimed at purifying Islam from the heavy complex of innovations that had grown around it over the centuries, but the establishment of a 'pure Islamic state' could be achieved only when political control has been established. What Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi could not achieve in India during the nineteenth century was achieved by the House of Su'ud in Arabia during the present century. In the spheres of social, educational and religious reforms, Wahhabism in Arabia cannot claim to have made much headway. The lead in this respect came from another country, Egypt.

### *(ii) Al-Afghani and India*

Throughout the nineteenth century, Western powers gradually increased their sphere of influence in the East. The Arab world, especially Arab Africa, was severed from the Ottoman Empire and brought under the political and economic control of the West. Among the many stalwarts of this period who led powerful resistance movements against the ever-increasing encroachment of the Western powers in the Arab World was Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-97). Al-Afghani believed that political unity of the Islamic world alone can save it from becoming a prey to western designs. Even though his ideas about Pan-Islamism were mediaeval in character, they were utilized as instruments of political resistance against the West. Thus, around his personality gathered all the anti-imperialist and politically progressive forces of the Middle East. Pan-Islamism was however doomed to failure for the liberal and nationalist forces of the time were too powerful to

give way to a unity on a religious basis. Al-Afghani's role in arousing nationalist feelings in Egypt, Iran or Turkey cannot however be minimized. Though he also preached social and religious reform, his main emphasis was on political freedom. Islamic sentiments of the uneducated Muslim masses are being exploited for political purposes in many countries even today, e.g., the movement of the Islamic Pact, but while al-Afghani's Pan-Islamism aimed at the political liberation of the Arab world and the Muslims, the Islamic Pact and similar other movements of to-day have aligned themselves with the reactionary forces of the world. They are anti-progressive in character and pro-imperialist, politically.

The impact of al-Afghani's ideas and activities on India during the nineteenth century was very deep and effective. He considered Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh (the present Aligarh Muslim University) a reactionary, for the latter was politically pro-British. Sayyid Ahmad Khan believed that educational and religious reforms alone can ameliorate the plight of the Indian Muslims. For al-Afghani political independence was of primary importance. Thus, the two never agreed. However, al-Afghani did exercise some influence on the Muslim intelligentsia in Hyderabad where he stayed for three years. "It was, perhaps, as a result of his influence that the magazines *Mu'allim*, edited by Muhibb-i Hasani, and *Mu'allim-i Shafiq*, edited by Sajjad Mirza were started in Hyderabad."<sup>15</sup> It was during his sojourn in Hyderabad that the Orabi Revolt reached its climax in Egypt in 1882. Al-Afghani was immediately sent to Calcutta under police surveillance and was not allowed to leave the city for some months. The British government took this precaution probably to offset any repercussion that the Revolt might have in India. But perhaps this was not the only reason. Al-Afghani's articles published in the local press contained bitter criticism of official policies and the Government was probably apprehensive of the influence they might have on Indian Muslims. Although in India al-Afghani was not as successful in creating a nucleus of politically conscious intellectuals as he was in Egypt and in other countries, his views on religious and social reforms nevertheless found expression in later years in the writings of many eminent Indian Muslim leaders.<sup>16</sup> Thus, neither an Indian nor an Arab by birth, al-Afghani formed



an important political and cultural link between India and the Arab world during the nineteenth century.

(iii) *Muhammad 'Abduh*

During the nineteenth century Egypt produced several reformers and political figures. But a truly great social and religious reformer was the *mufti* of Egypt, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). 'Abduh was closely associated with al-Afghani, but in many of his ideas could be compared to Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India. Muhammad 'Abduh's ideas about social and religious reform and his efforts at educational reform in Egypt during the last century place him among the pioneers of the reformist movements of the nineteenth century. The modern Arab world owes much to him by way of social and religious change. His radical thought and struggle against traditionalism and in support of *ijtihad* (re-interpretation of Islam) won him many a foe and friend in the world of Islam of his time. In India he is even today criticized for his radical ideas on Islam by a section of the orthodox '*ulama* and his name in these circles is taboo. While 'Abduh is 'heretical' to many of these orthodox '*ulama*, his pupil Shaykh Rashid Rida (1865-1935), the founder of the *Salafiya* movement in Egypt (the followers of 'traditionalism') was hailed as a hero and a saviour of Islam, in India. He visited India in 1912 to preside over the 1912 Session of the Nadwat al-'Ulama at Lucknow. In this Session Maulana Azad, Shibli Nu'mani, Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi and others participated.<sup>17</sup>

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77. *Ibid.*, Preface, p. XV and p. 12.
78. *Ibid.*, Preface, p. XX.
79. *Ibid.*, p. XX.
80. *Ibid.*, p. XX.
81. *Ibid.*, p. XXII.
82. *Ibid.*, p. XXV.
83. *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzali* by M. Umaruddin, Aligarh 1962, p. 31.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
89. Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. al-Nafis, a physician of Egypt, contributed "a clear conception of the pulmonary circulation of the blood" (*H.O.A.*, p. 685).
90. Dr. C. Edward Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, London 1879, Preface, p. X.



## III

1. Umaruddin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
2. See for details *al-Daris fi Ta'rikh al-Madaris*, by 'Abd al-Qadir b. Muhammad al-Nu'aymi, 2. Vols., Damascus 1948 and 1951.
3. Y. H. Khan, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, Bombay 1962, p. 72.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Quoted from Y. H. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
11. Y. H. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-82.
12. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
13. Y. H. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-89.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
19. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. XI.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. XII-XIII, 250-251.
21. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. XV.
22. *Ibid.*, p. XV.
23. *Ibid.*, p. XVII.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. XXII-XXIII.
25. *Ibid.*, p. XXIV.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. XXIV-XXV.
27. *Ibid.*, p. XXX.
28. The work entitled *Shri Guru Nanak Chamatkar* (in Gurmukhi), Part II, by Dr. Vir Singhji, published by Bhai Indar Singh Mangit, Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar 1960, gives a full account of Guru Nanak's dialogues with some Muslim religious leaders in Mecca and Baghdad. The dates of his travels are not however given. A tablet in Baghdad, discovered in 1916, commemorating the visit of the Guru gives the date of his visit as 927 A.H. (1520-21); see Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. I: (1469-1839), Princeton 1963, p. 34, Note 20.
29. Khushwant Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
30. *Shri Guru Nanak Chamatkar*, pp. 155-57.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-72.
32. M. G. Zubaid Ahmad has made a general survey, covering all the branches developed in India, in his work entitled: *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature*, Allahabad 1946.
33. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. IV.
34. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. IV.

35. *Ibid.*, p. IV.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, pp. IV-V.
39. *Ibid.*, p. V.
40. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
41. H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, London 1949, p. 163.
42. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. V-VI.
43. *Ibid.*, p. VI.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. Zubaid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.
- 46\*. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-155.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 157.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.
50. See the discussion on the subject by U. T. Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-3.
51. S. M. H. Nainar, 'Arabic and Persian Words in Tamil Language', paper read at the All-India Oriental Conference, Tirupati, March 1940.
52. M. B. Ahmad, *The Administration of Justice in Medieval India*, Aligarh, 1941, p. 25.
53. M. B. Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 223-31.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 224.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 224.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 266-69.
60. Asaf A. A. Fyze, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*, Oxford 1964
- p. 48.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
64. Edited by A. A. A. Fyze, 2 vols., Ma'arif Press, Cairo 1951 and 1961.

## IV

1. H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p. 166.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
4. Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, pp. 167-8.



9. Ikram (341-2) quoted from Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
10. S. M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, ed. by Ainslie T. Embree, New York and London, 1964, p. 282. Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 210, is of the view that although a two-day exchange between the Wahhabis and the non-Wahhabis could be naturally expected during the one year's stay of Sayyid Ahmad and his companion in Hijaz, "on the whole the stream of Indo-Muslim religious reformism, though parallel to Wahhabism, remained quite divergent".
11. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, p. 282.
12. Ikram, *H.M.C.I. & P.*, p. 402.
13. Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
14. Ikram, *H.M.C.I. & P.*, p. 406.
15. Anwar Mu'azzam, "Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in India", *Bulletin of the Institute of Islamic Studies*, Aligarh 1960, p. 88.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
17. Sulayman Nadvi, *Hayat-i Shibli*, pp. 499-505.

## CHAPTER II

# DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS AND POLITICAL COLLABORATION

### 1. THE ANCIENT PERIOD

INDIA'S COMMERCIAL and cultural relations with the Arab world are known to have existed since the third millenium B.C. and yet positive evidence of any political or diplomatic contacts between India and West Asia or Egypt during the period of antiquity is lacking. Little can be added to what has already been mentioned in connection with cultural relations between these areas. However, a brief recapitulation of what is known of the political and diplomatic relations of the time may not be out of place here.

The "land of Punt" to which, according to ancient Egyptian inscriptions, Queen Hatshepsut of the New Kingdom sent an expedition probably in 1495 B.C. is more likely to be India than Somaliland. This expedition probably had some diplomatic mission, as indicated by the pomp with which it was received and the lavish exchange of presents between the Queen's envoy and the ruler of Punt. But stories like the invasion of India by the Assyrian Queen Semiramis (c. 810 B.C.) are hardly creditable.<sup>1</sup>

A group of Indian military men known as Hittites and Mitannis, who were probably the same as the Madas or Medians of Persia, established their rule in northern Mesopotamia in the second millenium. Their princes bear Aryan names, e.g. Dush-ratta. They worshipped Indian gods, Mitra, Varna, Indra and Nasatya, and taught the people of the region horse breeding and breaking. The Mittani tribe (probably the military aristocracy) was called *Kharri*, and this may be identical with Arya, which was the normal designation in Vedic literature from the Rigveda onwards of an Aryan of the three upper classes.<sup>2</sup>

The rise of Achaeminids in Persia (549-525 B.C.) brought



India into extensive contact with the outside world. The construction of the Nile canal, exploration of the Indian Ocean from the Persian Gulf to the delta of the Indus and then to the apex of the Red Sea, maritime expeditions organized by Darius, and Dahhak's expedition against Bahu of Ceylon, a vassal of the Maharaja, ruler of India,<sup>3</sup> all contributed to this.

Dionysius was sent by Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, to the Mauryan court, and left an account of India. The Mauryan Kings also sent ambassadors to the Egyptian court. The story that Bindusara (d. 272 B.C.), father of Asoka, requested Seleucus' successor, Antiochus Soter of Syria, to send him figs and sweet wine, and also a Sophist, may not be regarded as credible, but the very existence of such a story indicates that good relations had already existed between them.<sup>4</sup>

According to Megasthenes the city of Pataliputra had a special department which looked after the interests of foreigners, suggesting that there was an influx of foreigners into India about this time. Diodorus also refers to the admiration of a king Palibothra (probably a Mauryan) for the Greeks.

Antiochus the Great of Syria (c. 206 B.C.) was the last great ruler of the West to maintain any direct contact with India. "The Parthian and its successor-state the Sassanid empires served for more than eight hundred years as buffer-states between India on the one hand and the kingdoms of the West, including the mighty Roman empire, on the other."<sup>5</sup> This brings us down to the 6th century A.D. or the time of Prophet Muhammad in Arabia.

## 2. THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

### A. *Arabs and the Indian Rajas*

#### (i) *Conquest of Sind by the Arabs*

The 7th century A.D. was a landmark in the history of the Arab people. The rise of Islam as a religion and a political force completely reorientated the course of their history and brought about a social and cultural revolution in their life and society. Before the rise of Islam, such countries as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Palestine had for centuries been subjected to foreign political domination. In fact the political freedom of the inhabitants of these countries had been usurped by alien conquerors ever since

the decline of the great ancient civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Syria. Egypt, Syria, parts of north Africa, and northern Arabia were under Greek, Roman, or Byzantine rule for many centuries before the rise of Islam, and during the 7th century A.D. formed the outlying provinces of the Byzantine Empire. Iraq and the surrounding regions came under the sway of the Sasanian rule, whose influence extended as far as Egypt on the one side and the Persian Gulf and the Sea beyond on the other. The rise of Islam, and with it the political expansion of the inhabitants of the Island of Arabia, completely changed political scene of the Middle Eastern region. The European rulers of the western regions as well as the Persian rulers of the eastern ones suffered great political set-backs at the hands of the Arabs and lost their former political supremacy and prestige.

For India the 7th century A.D. was a period of political disruption and decline. The glorious eras of the Mauryas and the Guptas had ceased to be, but the literary and scientific achievements of the Indians during these periods were known, though vaguely, to the Arabs also, for they are referred to in the Arabic literature that flowered in the Middle East subsequently. The period of Harsha coincided with that of Prophet Muhammad in Hijaz. While the Indians faced general political decline, the Arabs were going through new political experiences for the first time in their history. The political successes of the Arabs of Hijaz and Najd brought them close to the boundaries of India and, finally, the conquest of Sind by Muhammad b. Qasim in A.D. 711-12 extended the Arab rule to the very soil of India. Thus, having been amputated from the body politic of India, Sind became a part of the vast Islamic Empire extending from Qairawan in North Africa to Central Asia and from the Caucasus regions to the shores of the Arabian sea.\*

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\*The statement of Dr. Hasan Ibrahim Hassan that Kashmir was conquered by the Arabs during the Caliphate of Abu Ja'far al-Mansur or that Arab conquest continued until the 12th century A.D. is not correct. (*Ta'rikh al-Islam*, Cairo, 1953, Vol. II, pp. 217, 218). When Hisham b. 'Amr al-Taghlibi was appointed governor of Sind by Caliph al-Mansur (754-775) he also attempted the invasion of the Valley of Kashmir and reached as far as the southern slopes of the Himalayas which were subject to Kashmir. He however failed to enter the Valley or occupy it. This was the last attempt of the Arabs to occupy Kashmir. (Mohibbul Hasan Khan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, Calcutta 1959, p. 28).



(ii) *Arab Rulers of Sind and the Gurjara-Pratiharas*

The relations of the Arab rulers of Sind with the neighbouring Indian princes, the Gurjara-Pratiharas,<sup>6</sup> were anything but peaceful. Multan in the north and al-Mansura<sup>7</sup> in the south had roughly formed the eastern boundaries of the Arab rule in Sind and the Punjab. It appears from the scattered references in Arabic writings that political tension continued to exist between the Arab rulers of Sind and the Indian rulers. The reason for this was that Multan at this time was an important pilgrim centre, for it had the great temple of the sun-god Aditya which the Hindus from all over India came to worship. Thus it was a great source of revenue for the Arab rulers. It also acted as a deterrent against the invasions of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, for whenever they planned to conquer Multan or carry away the idol, the Muslims threatened the invaders with the destruction of the idol. It is at the same time evidence of the military weakness of the rulers of Multan, who were forced to adopt such tactics and to play upon the religious feelings of the invading princes.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Mansura was comparatively secure from such raids, perhaps due to the intervening barrier of the Thar desert. Here the *khutba* was read in the name of the 'Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad.<sup>9</sup> Sind at this time was an important centre of Isma'ili followers.

(iii) *Arabs and the Rashtrakutas*

The position of the Arabs living in southern India was different from that of the Arabs of Sind. In the south the Arab merchants and travellers were cordially welcomed by the rulers, especially by the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan, whom the Arabs refer to as *Balhara*. The Arab writers of this period are full of praise for these rulers, for they protected their lives and property and gave them full facilities for trade and freedom of worship.

Whether the Rashtrakutas' cordial and friendly relations and attitude towards the Arabs visiting their Kingdom was due to the fact that the Arabs came to their country as peaceful merchants, or whether there was any other reason, is not clear from the Arabs' accounts. It may be that since the Rashtrakutas were usually at war with the Gurjara-Pratiharas of the north, and since the latter were not on peaceful terms with the Arabs of Sind, the Rashtrakutas displayed a specially favourable attitude towards the Arabs so as to gain the sympathies of the Arab rulers of Sind. How-

ever, the conditions were more favourable in the south than in the north for the Arabs. This was one of the reasons why the Arab travellers and historians were able to write in greater detail about southern India than about the north. It was not until the beginning of the 11th century that we find detailed and comprehensive accounts of India beginning with those of al-Biruni.

There were many Arab colonies in Malabar, in the Konkan province of the kingdom of the Rashtrakutas, in Gujerat and some other coastal regions of peninsular India. They formed small communities and groups of their own, and some of them had even acquired the right of self-government. For example, in Chaul (near Bombay), at the head of each community was appointed a person who administered their personal and communal affairs. He held the title of *hazimat*; the *hazimat* at the time of al-Mas'udi's visit in 916 was a certain Abu Sa'id Ma'ruf b. Zakariya.<sup>10</sup>

There is little doubt that during the period under discussion several envoys and embassies were sent to India for the purpose of establishing cultural contacts. In this respect the illustrious viziers of the 'Abbasid caliphs, al-Baramika, played a very important role. One such embassy was sent by the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, as a result of which several Indian scientists and physicians visited Baghdad. Yahya b. Khalid al-Barmaki, the distinguished vizier of Caliph al-Mansur, had sent an envoy to the East to collect material on political and religious conditions, on medicinal plants and other aspects of life of the Eastern peoples. The date of his visit has been fixed at C.A.D. 800. It is not certain if these embassies had any political objectives. Diplomatic relations did however exist between the Arab rulers of Sind and the 'Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad or the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt in so far as the question of the Arab rulers' allegiance to one caliphate or the other was concerned. This question will be dealt with in the next section.

### B. Muslim Rulers of India and the Caliphs

One of the most important religio-political aspects of the relations between the Arab and non-Arab Muslim rulers of India on the one hand and the 'Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad or the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt on the other was that generally the



Indian Muslim rulers considered it politically expedient to get legal sanctions for their rule from the Arab caliphs in the form of *manshurs* and *sanads*. The caliphs of Baghdad, right up to the 13th century, were accepted as the lawful representatives and vicegerents of Prophet Muhammad by the orthodox Muslims of the East, and as such they exercised considerable influence, religious and political; Muslims looked up to them and respected their opinions. It was for this reason and in order to establish the legality of their rule that the Arab rulers of Sind and the Sultans of Delhi endeavoured to get *sanads* and *manshurs* from the caliphs. This legal sanction made their rule acceptable to the Muslims and established them as an integral force in the political set-up of the Islamic world of the time.

However, the status of the *Khilafat* itself had not become stabilized. The establishment of the Fatimid rule in North Africa and Egypt in the 10th century A.D. had complicated matters. The Islamic world was divided into two big camps: the Sunnis and the Shi'as, originating from a rift that was caused in the early history of Islam over the religio-political question of the *khilafat*. Thus, the Isma'ili or the Shi'a rulers in general owed allegiance to the caliphs of Baghdad. In a way, therefore, the factional politics of the Arab world continued to be reflected in the rivalries and jealousies of the Arab rulers in Sind and of the Sultans of Delhi.

#### (i) *Arabs of Sind and the Caliphs*

The rulers of al-Mansura read the *khutba*\* for the 'Abbasids.<sup>11</sup> The *amir* of Multan, a Qurayshite and a descendent of Sama b. Lu'ayy b. Ghalib, did not obey the ruler of al-Mansura but read the *khutba* in the name of the 'Abbasid caliphs.† Mu'tazz b. Ahmad (or Mughir b. Ahmad), the ruler of Turan,\*\* read the *khutba* for the Caliph of Baghdad<sup>12</sup> and so did Mutahhar b. Rija††

\*In the *khutba* read in the mosques on Friday the name of the Caliph was recited which was a sign of allegiance of the ruling monarch to the Caliph.

†*Ibid.*, pp. 21, 63; but according to al-Maqqisi, they read the *khutba* for the Fatimids. 'They neither decide matters nor sign contracts without the permission of the Fatimid Caliph. They send continuous envoys and gifts to Egypt.' (*Ibid.*, p. 43).

\*\*The region around Khuzdar in the eastern parts of the Kalat state (Baluchistan). See Al-Idrisi, *India*, p. 160.

††Another reading is: Muzaffar b. Rija, see *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14, 26, 63.

the ruler of Mashkay.<sup>13</sup> These rulers of Sind belonged mainly to the 10th century A.D. but by the end of this century the political influence of the Isma'ilis had increased considerably and for more than a century Multan and Mansura continued to owe allegiance to the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt.\*

(ii) *The Sultans of Delhi, the Mughals and the Caliphs*

After the collapse of the Samanids and with the expansion of the State of Ghazna under his energetic rule, Mahmud felt strong enough to assume the title of 'Sultan'. He thought it worth his while to get his title as an independent Sultan confirmed by the Caliph of Baghdad. He had received the title of *Yamin al-Daula* and *Amin al-Milla*, but was anxious to get additional titles from the Caliph. But the latter declined to give him one.<sup>14</sup>

The Ghoris were equally eager to secure confirmation of their sovereignty from the Caliph of Baghdad. Ghayas al-Din received his investiture from Caliph al-Mustadi (1170-80) and al-Nasir (1180-1225). Similarly, Yaloz also got his Letters of Patent from the Caliph.<sup>15</sup>

Iltutmish described himself as the lieutenant of the Caliph on his coins and possibly in the *khutba* also. In this he simply followed the Islamic Law, political convention and the heritage from the Ghaznavids and the Ghoris. He had also received a robe of honour from the Caliph of Baghdad, but it is not clear whether the robe was sent to him on his own request or whether the Caliph conferred it upon him for political reasons. R. P. Tripathi remarks that whatever may be the case, "the fact fastened the fiction of Khilafat on the Sultanate of Delhi, and involved legally the recognition of the final sovereignty of the Khalifa, an authority outside the geographical limits of India, but inside that vague yet none the less real brotherhood of Islam."<sup>16</sup>

Iltutmish maintained diplomatic relations with Baghdad and frequently exchanged envoys. Maulana Razi al-Din Hasan Saghani came to Delhi during the reign of Iltutmish as the envoy of the Caliph al-Nasir li-din Allah (A.D. 1179-1225) and his suc-

\* The political influence of the Isma'ilis was first established in Multan by Jalam b. Shayban in 373 A.H./983 A.D. He issued coins in the name of the Fatimid Caliph and acknowledged him as the legal sovereign (Nizami, K.A., *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India in the 13th century*, Aligarh 1961, p. 291).



cessors. Ikhtiyar al-Mulk Rashid al-Din Abu Bakr Habsh was sent to Baghdad on a mission by the court of Delhi, probably to secure a *manshur* from the Caliph. Once the Caliph sent Qadi Jalal'Urus with an old copy of *Safinat al-Khulafa'* which contained some autographic inscription from al-Ma'mun. The Sultan was so pleased with this present that he wanted to give half of his kingdom to Qadi Jalal.<sup>17</sup>

However, Balban inscribed the coins and read the *khutba* in the name of the deceased Khalifa. "It was a sort of challenge to the Mughal Khaqan; for it amounted to: "The Khalifa is dead, long live the Khalifa!"<sup>18</sup>

By the time the Tughluqs came to power, the seat of the *Khilafat* in the Arab world had shifted from Baghdad to Egypt and now the Memlukes of Egypt had become the inheritors of this sacred institution. They retained it until the Ottomans conquered Egypt in A.D. 1526 and carried the insignia of *Khilafat* with them to Istanbul and from this time onwards the whole of the Islamic world looked up to the Ottoman Sultan as the Khalifa.

The Tughluqs came to power as the champions of the faith and hence they could "hardly afford to neglect the religious aspect of the Muslim polity".<sup>19</sup> Ghayas al-Din had adopted the title of "*Nasir-i Amir al-Mu'minin*".<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Tughluq on the other hand, dropped all references to the *Khilafat* though he did not himself assume the title of *Khalifa* or *Amir al-Mu'minin*. But later, after he had suffered a series of natural calamities, "he craved the favour of the Khalifa in Egypt to confirm him in the Sultanate of Delhi." He removed his name from the *khutba* (A.H. 741) and the coins and instead, inserted that of the Khalifa.\* "This", as Tripathi remarks, "was a revival of the legal superiority of the Khalifa with a vengeance, and practically amounted to making the Sultanate of Delhi a dependency of a foreign and imbecile power."<sup>21</sup> Firoz regarded the recognition of his political authority in India by the Khalifa as "the greatest honour that he had ever held in his life." He was the first to introduce the fashion of styling the Sultan as the *na'ib* or *khalifa* (deputy) of the *Khalifa*. His titles were expressive of the relative position of the Sultan of Delhi to the Khalifa. This position he used even to

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\*R. P. Tripathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-62. He approached Hakim bi-amr Allah (A.D. 1339-47) of Egypt for the royal *sanad*.

cover his weakness. At least in one case "he waived all his claims over the Deccan in favour of the Bahmani Sultans of the Deccan on the ground that the Khalifa had recommended it".<sup>22</sup>

The Tughluqs were very generous and kind-hearted towards the Arabs visiting their kingdom. The fourteenth century Arab historian Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari tells us that 'Ali b. Mansur al-'Uqayli, one of the Arab amirs of Bahrayn related to him the following: "Our ambassadors visit India continuously, and we have plenty of information about that country. We have been continuously informed that this Sultan Muhammad b. Tughluq-shah made great conquests."<sup>23</sup> "He is a generous and noble person and bestows his bounties upon the foreigners. Two of our men (once) travelled (to India) and went to him. They had the good fortune of being introduced to him. So, he granted them favours and offered them robes of honour. He paid them large sums of money although they belonged to ordinary (class) of Arabs. Then, he offered them the option of either staying on (in his kingdom), or returning (to their homeland). So, one of them chose to stay on and the Sultan gave him (as gift) a large piece of land and considerable amount of wealth, besides, many cattle, sheep and cows. At present he is still living there, wealthy and content. As for the other person, he sought permission to return. So, he (the Sultan) granted him 3000 gold *tankas*; he was likewise happy and contented."<sup>24</sup>

Again, we learn on the authority of al-'Umari that Muhammad b. Tughluq had deputed one of his Secretaries named Bayghadan to go to Sultan Abu Sa'id, one of the Ilkhans of Persia (A.D. 1316-1335), as messenger and had given him one million *tankas* to be distributed in the shrines of Kufa, Basra and 'Iraq. But Bayghadan had different ideas and he did not intend to return to the court of Muhammad. On his arrival in Iraq he found that Abu Sa'id had died. He went to Baghdad, then to Damascus and finally settled down in Baghdad. He and his companions had about five hundred horses.

The same historian tells us the story<sup>25</sup> of a certain 'Adud, son of the Qadi Yezd, whom Sultan Abu Sa'id had despatched to Delhi for he was proving rebellious and aspired for the *wizarat* of which he was quite unworthy. The Sultan received him with honour and presented him with robes and gifts. At the time of his departure the Sultan asked him to take what he desired from



the Royal Treasury. 'Adud being a shrewd man only took a copy of the *Qur'an*. To the Sultan's query, he replied that as the king had bestowed upon him enough wealth and bounty, he did not find anything better than the book of God to select from there. This reply further pleased the Sultan and he gave him a present of 800 *tumans* (or 80 lakhs of *dinars*) for himself and for Sultan Abu Sa'id. It is related, however, that these presents did not reach Sultan Abu Sa'id for on the way back 'Adud had to part with a portion of his wealth to Amir Ahmad b. Khwaja Rashid. Later, 'Adud died and no one knew what happened to the wealth.

The Lodis were the last of the pre-Mughal rulers of India to call themselves *Na'ibs* or *Khalifas* of the Amir al-Mu'minin. But there is no evidence to show that they had any diplomatic relations with Egypt. "The formal name of the Khalifa was dying out in India and provincial Indian rulers had begun to drop it from the coins."<sup>26</sup> Like Mubarak Shah, Sher Shah Suri assumed the *Khilafat* for himself.<sup>27</sup> The Timurids did not believe in "the legal superiority of the Khalifa dead or living."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the Tughluqs were the last Sultans of India who had any real diplomatic or political relations with the Arabs.

"The relations between the rulers of Delhi and the exotic *Khilafat* continued in theory and to a considerable extent in practice right through the Turkish and the Lodi period, only with two short breaks."<sup>29</sup> It was not until the Mughals arrived in India that the fiction of the foreign *Khilafat* received a final blow. But the concept of the *Khilafat* continued to exist throughout the Mughal period and even up to the present times. The practice of inscribing the names of the first four *Khalifas* begun in India probably by Muhammad Tughluq was fully established by the Mughals. "Sher Shah and Imam Shah probably wanted to establish the centre of *Khilafat* in India. Akbar took up the idea and was anxious to make the *Khilafat* a living institution in his own person. But general disapproval led him to merge it in the Mughal and Indo-Iranian conception".<sup>30</sup> Neither the Mughals nor the Surs ever recognised the Ottoman Sultans of Turkey as the *Khalifas*.

### (iii) *Tipu Sultan*

Among the Indian rulers of the later Mughal period Tipu Sultan's efforts to re-establish trade and technical relations with

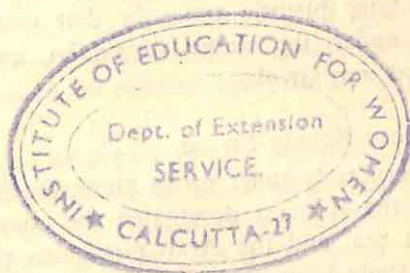
the Ottoman empire and to obtain a *sanad* from the Ottoman Sultan are significant. Having failed to obtain a *sanad* from Delhi, he decided to obtain it from Constantinople. With this objective he sent an embassy to the Sultan, but the object of the embassy was also to obtain commercial privileges in the Ottoman empire and technicians from Constantinople who would be able to introduce and develop various industries in Mysore. Ghulam 'Ali Khan who was the leader of the delegation was instructed to enter into a treaty with the Ottoman Government, one of the bases of which was that Tipu should be given trade facilities in Basra and permission to establish a factory there. In return he would give similar facilities and privileges to the Ottoman Government in any part which it might select in the Mysore kingdom. Although the embassy failed to achieve a treaty of alliance with the Ottoman Government, it succeeded in achieving confirmation of Tipu to the throne of Mysore and the title of an independent king.<sup>31</sup> Tipu's was probably the last example where an Indian ruler sought to acquire religious sanction for his rule from a Muslim Khalifa.

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3. Hadi Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 3; cf. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 614.
4. *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 615-16.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 616-17.
6. They ruled from A.D. 800-1037.
7. The ruins of Mansura lie 47 miles to the north-east of Hyderabad (Sind). See Minorsky, *H.A.*, p. 372.
8. *India and the Neighbouring Territories in the Kitab Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Khtiraq al-'Afaq of al-Sharif al-Idrisi*, tr. with commentary by S. Maqbul Ahmad, Leiden 1960, pp. 149-150.
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11. S. Razia Jafri, 'Description of India', etc. *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 19, 43, 62.
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13. Corresponds to mashkel (also Mashkedh), Minorsky, *H.A.*, p. 373.



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23. *Dau' jadid 'ala ta'rikh al-Hind*, ed. by K. A. Fariq, *Ta'rikh-i Hind par na'i raushni*, Delhi 1961, pp. 69-70.
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26. R. P. Tripathi, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
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28. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
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31. Mohibbul Hasan, *History of Tipu Sultan*, Calcutta, 1951, pp. 133-37.



## CHAPTER III

# INDO-ARAB TRADE AND COMMERCE

### 1. THE ANCIENT PERIOD

#### (i) *Baluchistan and Harappan Commerce with Mesopotamia*

INDIA'S COMMERCIAL relations with the Arab world may be traced back to the third millenium B.C. Contact was established between the merchants of the Kulli Culture in Southern Baluchistan and those of early dynastic Sumer, probably soon after 2800 B.C. There is evidence pointing to the presence of Indian merchants from Makran and Baluchistan in the cities of Elam and Sumer in early dynastic times. These traders settled in Sumer, "a little closed society with its own rites and customs."<sup>1</sup> The trade, as the evidence indicates, was carried on by sea and not by land. The Harappa civilization may have established contact with the West between the years 2300 and 2000 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Piggott points out, "Cotton cloth is likely to have been an important article of commerce for the Harappa civilization, and it is probable that some at least of the trade with Mesopotamia was in cotton goods. By later historic times in that country Indian cotton was known under the name of *sindhu*, and this in the form *sindon* passed into Greek.

#### (ii) *The Graeco-Roman Period*

From very early times up to about the 3rd century A.D., the Greeks and the Romans dominated the commercial activities in the Arabian Sea, and the Arab merchants played an important role in this trade from very ancient times. The early Arabs, the descendants of Joktan (Qahtan), had driven away the Arab 'Red Men', probably the ancestors of the Phoenicians, from southern Arabia in about 1800 B.C. and the kingdom of Hadramaut was founded by Hazarmaveth. These Arabs were the main agents



of trade between India and Egypt. They supplied to Egypt precious stones, spices and the incense burnt at the altars of the ancient Egyptian gods. From India muslin and spices were supplied which they either fetched themselves or bought from the Indian merchants at their ports on the Gulf of Aden. It was through this lucrative trade and contacts with the ancient civilizations of the East, India and Egypt, that these Arabs built a magnificent civilization whose political and cultural centre was at Sabaea.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Agatharchides (113 B.C.), there was "no nation upon earth so wealthy as the Gerrhaeans and Sabaeans, because of their situation in the centre of all the commerce which passes between Asia and Europe."<sup>4</sup> Besides, we have some evidence of early Arab contacts with India. During the reign of King Solomon (c. 974-932) voyages were made to Ophir once every three years and the merchandise brought from there consisted of gold, silver, jewels, *almug* wood, ivory, apes and peacocks.<sup>5</sup> There were Indian merchant settlements on the Island of Socotra. King Ptolemy II of Egypt is said to have displayed in his procession in 271/70 B.C., Indian women, oxen and marble. The importance of the trade relations between India, Egypt and South Arabia during this period may be realized from the fact that when Alexander built the city of Alexandria, its foundation affected the economy of both India and South Arabia. The period between 31 B.C. and A.D. 96 is considered to be the golden age of Graeco-Roman trade with India. The decline of trade with Egypt took place during the weak rule of the Ptolemaic kings. During the 3rd century A.D. with the economic decline of the Roman Empire and the depreciation of the currency, all Greek traffic withered away. This is shown by the complete absence of Roman coins in India after Caracalla (A.D. 212-217).

The principal ports of Egypt for the Egyptian trade at this period were Myes-Hormus and Berenice from where the boats bound for India left in July and if they cleared the Red Sea before 1st of September they had the monsoon to assist them in their passage across the Indian Ocean. "Ships were customarily filled out from Ariaca (the Gulf of Cambay?) and Barygaza (Broach) bringing to these far-side towns the product of their own places—wheat, rice, clarified butter, sesame, oil, cotton, cloth and girdles and honey from the seed called *sacchari*". The

Indian products were also carried to the eastern coast of Africa, especially the produce of Indian farms and fields. In the Arabian peninsula there were the two market towns of Petra and Muza and on the eastern shores of the Red Sea there were ports like Cana and Moscha. In the Persian Gulf there was Apologus (Ubulla) on the Eupharates and Charax Spasini (Muhammara) on the Shatt al-'Arab. To these places vessels were regularly sent from Barygaza loaded with copper and sandal-wood, teak-wood and logs of blackwood and ebony. Omana on the southern coast of the Persian Gulf, commanded a large ship-building industry. From all these three ports clothing, wine, pearls, dates, gold and slaves were exported to Barygaza. The main ports and market towns along the coast of India at this time were Barbaricum (Karachi) and Barygaza to the north; Muziris (Cranganore) and Nelcynda (Kottayam) to the south-west; Camara, Poduca, and Sopatma to the south-east; and Ganges on the delta of the Ganges. Muziris and Nelcynda exported large quantities of pepper, malabathrum, pearls and silk cloth and the ports of the Coromandal commanded an extensive coastal and sea-borne trade. The delta of the Ganges was apparently the terminus of Roman trade. The Romans seem also to have visited China on various occasions (A.D. 166, A.D. 226). However, the sea route to China was by no means a discovery of the Romans, for Chinese junks sailed to Malabar in the 2nd century B.C. and probably earlier.<sup>6</sup>

### (iii) *The Sasanian Period*

During the period between the decline of the Graeco-Roman trade with India in the 3rd century A.D. and the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D. a number of important political changes took place in the West Asian region. In Iran the Sasanian dynasty was established with Ctesiphon or Mada'in as the capital of the Empire which continued to be the entrepot of eastern trade up to the very rise of Islam. The decline of the Himyarite kingdom of south Arabia reached its climax in A.D. 523 when Dhu Nuwas embraced Judaism and persecuted the Christians of Najran, an act which aroused the antagonism of the Christian ruler of Abyssinia, and the kingdom was attacked by the Abyssinians several times. Finally, Yemen was conquered by Persia



in the reign of Nusherwan before A.D. 579, the date of his death, and after A.D. 570 the date of the birth of Prophet Muhammad. The decline of the Himyarite kingdom on the one hand and the growing interest of the Sasanians in the navigation of the Arabian Sea affected Arab trade relations with India, and caused the "transfer of the immemorial traffic between India and Egypt into the hands of Persia."<sup>7</sup>

Thus in the century before the rise of Islam the Persians were supreme in commercial activities in the Arabian Sea. Their boats frequented the harbours of India. They were also the intermediaries for the silk trade between China and the West. Sea-going ships from India sailed as far as al-Mada'in up the Tigris, and al-'Ubulla has been termed as *Farj al-Hind*, 'the marches of India'; so close were the relations by sea between this port and India. Among the most important ports of India at this time were Sindhu, Orrhatha, Calliana, Sibor and then the five marts of Male which exported pepper.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. ARAB TRADE SUPREMACY

### (i) *The Zenith of Indo-Arab Trade Relations*

The period between the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D. up to about the 10th century A.D. may be termed 'the golden age' of trade relations between India and the Arab world. Islam originated in and spread from Hijaz. Unlike the Arabs of southern Arabia, the Arabs of Hijaz were mainly inland traders. Mecca, which lay midway between Syria and Yemen, was the centre of their commercial activities. However, these Arabs did carry on some sea-trade as well. They were agents of trade between Egypt, Abyssinia and Hijaz, and their main port was Jiddah. In the inland trade, they bought Indian goods in Yemen and sold them in Mecca and other towns. In Mecca at this time a fair was annually held in which the commodities bought in San'a and other towns or in Syria were sold to the Beduins who gathered there to buy their annual requirements and also to worship their deities kept in the Ka'ba. The Quraysh who were the custodians of the Ka'ba were also the leading merchants of the town. Mecca being the nerve-centre of the commercial and cultural activities of Hijaz at this time, it is no wonder that the message of Islam arose and spread from this town.

Among the goods that were imported from India at this period and sold in the markets of Hijaz was the Indian sword called by the Arabs 'al-Muhannad'. The Beduins being warring tribes, instruments of war were most popular among them. Swords were imported both from Yemen and India. Those manufactured in Yemen were made out of the iron imported from India; others were manufactured in India. The swords of India had the reputation of being very supple and sharp. Pre-Islamic Arabian poetry has many references to these and other goods that came from India and were popular among the Beduins.<sup>9</sup>

An important factor contributing to the development of Indo-Arab trade was the rise and spread of the Arab political power which within a few years of the rise of Islam engulfed vast territories stretching between the Canary Islands, off the west coast of Africa, in the west and the borders of China in the east, and between the Caucasus in the north and the shores of the Arabian Sea in the south. The inclusion of Sind within the Arab Empire further accelerated the overland trade with India. However, the greatest impetus to the Indo-Arab sea-trade was given when Baghdad was founded by the 'Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur on the site of an ancient Sasanian village of the same name. The foundation of Baghdad was an epoch-making event in the history of Indo-Arab trade relations, for now, for the first time the capital of the Arab Empire was directly linked by water with the Arabian Sea through the water systems of the Tigris and the Euphrates which jointly flowed into the Persian Gulf. The ancient ports of 'Ubulla, Darayn and Sohar continued to play their role<sup>10</sup> and in time Basra was also developed and during the succeeding centuries acquired the significance of a Liverpool for the Arabs, where the imports and exports of the east and the west were stocked and exchanged. Goods imported from India, China, Egypt, East Africa and other countries were stocked here and then distributed to various centres of the Arab Empire; similarly, goods of export were carried from here to another port in the Persian Gulf, called Siraf,\* and from there

\*This port is now extinct. Its ruins are placed at Bandar Tahiri, at 27°38' Lat. N. It was destroyed in 977 by an earthquake. See Jean Sauvaget, *Akhbar al-Sin Wa 'l-Hind, Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde*, Fr. tr. and Notes by M. Jean Sauvaget, Paris 1948, p. 41, note 13.



loaded onto boats bound for India, China, and other countries of the east.

In India the most important ports of the Arab sea-trade at this time were: Daybul (near modern Karachi), Cambay, Broach, Thana, Sindabur<sup>11</sup> and Quilon on the west and south-west coast; and Ballin,\* Kanja (Conjeevaram), and Samundar† on the east coast. For about four centuries (9th-12th centuries A.D.) these ports were the main distributing centres of Indo-Arab trade. It is difficult to judge how far Arab trade extended into the interior of India, but all evidence leads to the conclusion that it was restricted mainly to the coastal regions and to the southern peninsula of India, and of course to Sind, parts of the Panjab, Bengal and Assam.\*\*

By the 11th century, however, Muslim merchants had reached as far as Kashmir. Al-Biruni, writing on the geography of India of the 11th century, states that Muslim merchants in his time traded as far as Rajauri in the north.<sup>12</sup> The Gurjara-Pratihara seemed to have been the main stumbling block for Arab trade in the northern parts of India, for they were antagonistic to the Arabs of Sind.

By the 10th century A.D. large communities of Arab merchants had settled down along the coastal regions of India. According to al-Mas'udi (d. A.D. 956), thousands of Arabs were found settled in Chaul and other towns of the Konkan region of Bombay. These communities had their own 'chiefs', appointed by the ruling princes, and were given the right to administer their communal affairs, but unlike the European merchants of the Mughal days or of the Ottoman Empire the Arab merchants during this period, do not seem to have acquired trading or capitulatory rights for themselves. They settled down in India as peaceful merchant communities and intermarried. The children of such marriages came to be known among the Arabs as *bayasira*.<sup>13</sup>

With the foundation of the Gurjara rule in Gujerat and Ka-

\*Probably on the south-eastern coast of India in the Tanjore district. See Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, pp. 114-15.

†May be identified with Sunur Kawan (Sonargaon).

\*\*According to al-Idrisi, boats sailed to 'Lugin' situated on a river. This port may tentatively be placed in the vicinity of the mouth of the river Hooghly. See, *Wasf al-Hind wa ma yujawiruha min al-bilad* by the Sharif al-Idrisi, ed. by S. Maqbul Ahmad, Aligarh 1954, p. 81.

thiawar with Nahlwara (Pattan) as its capital, Arab trade with India seemed to have acquired new significance. Nahlwara became the new centre of attraction for the Arab merchants. Traffic was diverted to Cambay and other ports of Gujerat. The twelfth century Sicilian geographer al-Idrisi describes Pattan as a very flourishing town at this period and refers to its ruler as 'Balhara',<sup>14</sup> a term that was also used by the earlier Arabs for the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan as has been observed earlier. The 'Balhara' of al-Idrisi when used for the ruler of Pattan probably referred to Jayasihna Siddharaja (A.D. 1096-1143). These Gurjara rulers also welcomed the Arab merchants and gave them all trade facilities.

During the period under discussion Arab trade relations with India may be said to have been at their zenith. In the art of navigation, the Persians, the majority of whom were now converted to Islam, continued to hold the supreme position. But from the 10th century onwards Persian navigation began to decline until it collapsed during the 16th century under the pressure of the Portuguese. Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese governor of India, sealed Persian trade with India by restricting the commercial activities of the Persians within the confines of Goa.

The Arabs seemed to have learnt and utilized the art of navigation from the Persians. From the accounts of the Merchant Sulayman, al-Mas'udi and others we get some idea of the sea-routes to India followed by the Arabs: normally, leaving Siraf, the boats which carried hardly two hundred odd passengers reached Muscat, where they collected fresh water for the journey; then with favourable winds they sailed straight to Quilon. The total voyage took two months or so. From Quilon the boats crossed the Straits of Palk and reached a port called Ballin: here the routes bifurcated: the boats bound for China left for the Andaman Nicobar Islands and from there went to Kalah in the Malay Peninsula, from where they went to Canton *via* Indo-China; others sailed north towards the Bay of Bengal and went to Kanja, Samundar, and other ports in the Delta of the Ganges. Indeed, coastal sailing from the Persian Gulf was in vogue, and boats sailed along the western and the eastern coasts of India, cruising and calling at numerous ports.

It would be out of place here to go into the details of Arab navigation or the art of boat-building but note should be taken



of an interesting fact about boat-building as reported by some Arab geographers. Arab sailors, specially from Oman and Marbat came to the Laccadive and the Maldiv Islands where they constructed boats from coconut-wood. After the boats were built they loaded them with coconut-wood and other goods and carried them away to their homeland.<sup>15</sup> These must have been the smaller types of boats which the Arabs used for cruising along the coasts. This was a very lucrative trade in those days.

### (ii) Imports and Exports

During the first century after the rise of Islam (c. 622-722) the main trade of India was with Iraq, but there was considerable decline as compared to the previous position, and India's trade with other Arab countries also declined. As pointed out by Salih Ahmad El-'Ali, this was a direct result of the Arab conquests. The import of finished goods from India had decreased as the Arabs, who had now become masters of the Middle East, increasingly needed armaments and weapons of war and cheap essential commodities rather than costly finished goods. Moreover, Arab merchants became engaged in the purchase and sale of stocks of booty acquired by the conquering armies, which business they found to be more profitable.<sup>16</sup> Sea-trade declined as it involved greater risks like wreckage, harm from pirate activities, etc. However, gold played an important part in what trade there was between India and the Arab countries. It was used as the only means of exchange by the Indian merchants.<sup>17</sup> After the foundation of Baghdad in A.D. 762 direct trade relations between India and the Arab countries seemed to have improved and lasted until roughly the 16th century A.D.

We may now briefly survey the important export commodities from India to the Arab world. Teak-wood was one such from the very ancient times and remained so during the Middle Ages. It was used mainly for house-building and ship-building. Raw iron and swords manufactured in India were exported in large quantities. Silver and other metals were also exported. Among the precious stones diamonds and crystals were exported; also, there seems to have been a flourishing trade in pearls. Al-Idrisi states that there were pearl-fisheries in Subara (Sopara, near Bombay) the products of which were probably exported to

the Arab world.<sup>18</sup> The horn of the rhinoceros was another rare and precious commodity that seems to have been in demand. According to the Arab writers, when cut open the horn displayed from inside figures of human beings, birds, etc., which added to the beauty of the material. These horns were used for manufacturing necklaces and other ornaments which were sold at high prices. The Indian kings made knives out of them and used them for detecting poison in food by dipping them into it. Indeed, the rhinoceros was more widespread in India at that time than it is today. Another much coveted commodity was the ivory which was traditionally exported from India from very ancient times. Among precious stones, diamonds from Kashmir seemed to have had great commercial value. Gold was found in Kamarupa.<sup>19</sup> Again, a variety of aromatics, spices and scents were exported in large quantities. The Malabar coast was famous for pepper and the Arabs' main trade with that country was in this commodity as also in cardamom, cinnamon, camphor, sandalwood, aloes-wood and perfumes. Among the fruits, mangoes, jack-fruit, lemons and citrons, coconuts, *jamans*, etc. were very well known to the Arabs. *Al-fanidh* or sugar-candy was manufactured in large quantities in Sind and was exported to the Islamic lands.<sup>20</sup> Among animals, elephants, civet-cats, etc. were exported. South India was famous for elephants of great height. Among the birds, peacocks are said to have been exported to the Arab countries. Apart from the articles listed above, fine muslin, cotton cloth, indigo, various types of dyes, and many other articles were exported to the Arab countries from India. Thana was famous for its cloth and Cambay for sandals.<sup>21</sup> It is very likely that ambergris was also exported from here. The sperm whale which secreted this matter was at this time present in large numbers in the Arabian Sea and ambergris was found along the shores of the Maldiv Islands.<sup>22</sup>

Among the goods imported by India were frankincense, ivory-tusks, horses, gold, pearls, dates and other finished goods.

It is difficult to say anything about the general effects of this trade on the economy of the respective countries as the details of the imports and the exports and the periodic trade figures and balances have not yet been worked out. But on the basis of the accounts of the Arab writers of this period, it may be surmised that the total balance of trade must have been



favourable to India. Firstly, gold was used by Indian merchants as means of exchange. Secondly, the volume of India's exports seems to have far exceeded that of the Arab countries to India. Lastly, the goods exported from India were costlier and more valuable than those imported by India.

### 3. THE PERIOD OF COMMERCIAL DECLINE

#### (i) *Causes of the Decline*

By the tenth century A.D. Baghdad had lost its former glory and importance as the cultural and economic centre of Islam. Fustat (old Cairo) had come into prominence. As a result of the continuous wars of the Crusades a large portion of Syrian and Egyptian trade was diverted to Western countries. Then, the devastation caused by the Mongol invasions of Western Asia and the rise of the petty dynasties in the latter 'Abbasid period had caused much disruption in trade and shaken the balance of economy of the Arab world. The 'Abbasid caliphate came to an end in A.D. 1258 when Hulagu sacked Baghdad. All these factors led to the decline of Arab trade with India. But by far the greatest set-back was caused by the appearance of the Portuguese in the Arabian Sea. Soon after this event both Arab and Persian sea-trade with India collapsed, and Arab naval strength deteriorated.

#### (ii) *The Portuguese Appear in the Indian Ocean*

The discovery of the sea-route to India via the Cape of Good Hope was an event of great significance in the commercial and political history of the eastern countries. In 1498 a Portuguese royal fleet under the command of Vasco da Gama reached Malindi on the east coast of Africa and it was, as if performing an act of self-annihilation, an Arab navigator by the name of Ahmad Ibn Majid who piloted the boat of Vasco da Gama to Calicut. This naive act of chivalry ultimately resulted in the ousting of the Arab and Persian merchants from the eastern waters. The Portuguese were guided by commercial and political as well as religious motives. Eastern trade had to pass through the Islamic lands, namely, Egypt, Syria and Turkey, to reach Europe. which meant paying heavy duties to the Muslim rulers on the

goods in transit. It was, therefore, the main objective of the Portuguese to find an alternative route to the Indies. The Portuguese had a bitter hatred of Islam and shared the general apprehension then prevalent in Europe of the imminent danger to Christendom from the Muslim powers established on the eastern and the northern coasts of the Mediterranean; these powers drew very large revenues from the goods which passed through their territories, and any diversion of this trade was bound to affect them adversely financially. Again, "the Portuguese were ardent Christians, inspired by a missionary zeal; and access to the Indies offered a prospect of preaching the Gospel to nations doomed by their ignorance to eternal damnation."<sup>23</sup>

The Malabar coast at this time was a great centre of foreign trade. Another centre in the east was Malacca. Indian ships went there, laden mainly with cotton goods and returned to India with silk, spices, drugs and other merchandise. Some of these goods were carried to the east coast, and distributed throughout India; some reached Gujerat, partly for India and partly for transshipment to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; a large portion reached the Malabar seaports, almost entirely for transshipment. The Malabar ships did not sail westward: the goods for the Red Sea were carried in Arab and Egyptian vessels, the agents for which lived in the ports, not as subjects of the local rulers but under special concessions which secured them rights of self-government; and since the various seaports, each under its own petty king or Chief, competed eagerly for the lucrative transshipment trade, these foreigners were assured of favourable treatment, and could exert much influence at the Courts; while acting as they did, in concert, they could sometimes dictate terms to the Indian importers. The Malabar ports were in a very favourable position. In addition to the imported goods they offered ample supplies of pepper which was an important article of consumption throughout northern Europe, and which in bulk, if not in value, was the largest single item in the cargoes for the Red Sea. The Egyptian and the Arab merchants living in the various small states who were subordinate to Vijayanagar but not subject to much control, were the main agents of this trade. The appearance of the Portuguese in this environment led to a conflict of interests. Thus, in fact, it was not a struggle between Christians and Muslims but one between im-



porters and exporters. The Indian importers, many of whom were Muslims, welcomed the Portuguese as new customers but the Arab and Egyptian exporters objected to them as new competitors, who might break the existing monopoly; and the upshot of complicated intrigues was that, while the newcomers quarrelled with the ruler of Calicut, the principal seaport on the Malabar coast, they established friendly relations at other centres, especially at Cochin, which offered the largest supply of pepper, and for a few years their annual fleets carried on a profitable trade. However, the Portuguese were not satisfied with merely a share in the trade; they aimed at controlling it. For this purpose they employed their powerful navy. The naval strength needed was not great, because there was little opposition; the only real fleet the Portuguese had to face was one which was equipped in Egypt and this was destroyed in a battle fought early in 1509, after which date they were masters of the eastern seas. The foundations of this 'maritime empire' were laid by Afonso de Albuquerque, Governor in the East from 1509 to his death in 1515. In 1509 he obtained possession of Ormuz, in 1510 he seized Goa, a seaport in the territory of Bijapur; in 1511 he captured Malacca. There were even designs to occupy Aden, but later acquisitions on the Indian coast, especially the fortress of Diu, rendered it unnecessary, for the Portuguese were in a position to dominate all the ports whence ships could start for the Red Sea, and in point of fact most of the Arab shipping agents soon left India. Thus, the Portuguese monopolized some sea-routes and some commodities; Indian and other shipping could ply between specified ports by obtaining special licences on payment of substantial fees. Unlicensed vessels were plundered. By these methods the Portuguese dominated the main trade-routes throughout the sixteenth century, and the fact that some goods continued to reach Europe overland was mainly due to the increasing corruption of their officials.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the Portuguese inflicted a heavy blow to the Arab, Egyptian and Persian trade relations with India, from which the latter could never recover. They were specially harsh to the Persians. In 1515 the ambassador of Shah Isma'il received the grim threat from Albuquerque: "... should merchants from Persia be found in any other district of India save the port of Goa, they should lose their merchandise and be made subject to

the greatest penalties which he could inflict." And as both the Moors and the Gentiles knew, these penalties were fire and water.<sup>25</sup> Egypt was occupied in a contest with the Portuguese over the Indian trade. In 1510, Egypt sent an ambassador to seek help from Bayazid, but the first help was wrecked in the sea and never reached Alexandria. However, Bayazid helped Egypt to oust the Portuguese from their position in India.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. RIVALRIES OF THE EUROPEAN POWERS

##### (i) *Further European Advance through Land and Sea*

Throughout the sixteenth century the Portuguese had become the main agents of India's foreign trade with the West. In the succeeding centuries, the Dutch, the Danes, the French and lastly the British manoeuvred against one another in an effort to control India's trade with Europe. The Mughal Emperors were conscious of the growing power of the Portuguese in the Arabian Sea. However, trade concessions and capitulatory rights were granted to European traders on Indian soil. The establishment of factories was followed by the building of forts, and lastly the purchase of lands and villages. This became a familiar pattern of European settlement in India and resulted in the rise of new ports and towns like Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Pondicherry.

The Arab countries had by now become part of the Ottoman Empire and in Iran there arose the powerful dynasty of the Safavids. Both these Powers were involved in a series of battles against the encroachment of the European powers in eastern waters and over the question of trade with India and other countries of the East. The Persian Gulf area was the main scene of activities at this time and European rivalries and political manoeuvres played an important role in this region also. However, not being satisfied with the sea-route *via* the Cape, which involved long and hazardous voyages, the Europeans aimed at breaking through the cordon that the Ottoman Turks laid for centuries against the commercial land-routes to the East. In 1798, Napoleon attacked Egypt in an effort to open a shorter route to India and also with the ultimate aim of assisting the French in the Franco-British rivalries that ensued in India at



the time. His efforts, however, were foiled and it was not until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 that a shorter sea-route to India was established.

During this period Indian goods, however, continued to flow into the Arab countries through various agencies. Caravan routes were opened and overland trade continued to flourish. The Mughals were interested in maintaining the pilgrim traffic to Mecca both by land and sea. Efforts were made by some Indian princes to create a naval power on the western coast with the help of the African settlers in Janjira, known as the Sidis, to protect Indian mercantile interests. Later, in 1670, Aurangzeb appointed the Sidi Chief as the Admiral of the Empire.<sup>27</sup> The pilgrim traffic to Mecca especially from Egypt and Syria played an important role in the distribution of Indian goods like muslin, shawls and pepper and a variety of other commodities purchased in Mecca and sold on the way back to these countries. "Both Egypt and Syria profited greatly from this trade. The goods of pilgrims were allowed to enter Egypt not only free of duty, but without inspection by the customs authorities, whether they came by land, caravan, or, even as the majority of pilgrims even from the Barbary States now did, by sea."<sup>28</sup> The caravans coming from 'Iraq consisted "almost entirely"<sup>29</sup> of goods from India, Persia and Arabia. "Severely though Egypt and the other Arab lands had suffered from the transference of the main Indian trade to the Cape route, their geographical position still conferred upon them immense natural advantages as centres of the entrepôt trade between Europe, Asia and Africa. The main points of the convergence of the trade-routes were Cairo and Aleppo, with a secondary centre at Baghdad."<sup>30</sup>

(ii) *Mysore's Trade Relations with the Arabs*

Tipu was alone among the Indian rulers to realize that a country could be great and powerful only by developing its trade industry. He cultivated good relations with the Arabs and had specially close relations with the Imam of Muscat. He established factories in foreign countries, the one at Muscat exported to Mysore saffron seeds, silk-worms, horses, pistachio nuts, rock-salt, pearls, raisins, sulphur and copper. Tipu's relations with the Imam of Muscat were cordial and the Mysore merchants were granted special concessions by him. While a duty of 10%

was levied on the goods of all foreign merchants, the goods from Mysore were subject only to 6%. The Imam and his subjects were similarly given trade facilities and privileges by Tipu in Mysore. There was also a factory at Jeddah. Efforts were made to establish factories at Basra and Aden. The factory at Ormuz purchased pearls.<sup>31</sup>

### 5. THE BRITISH DOMINATE

From about the middle of the nineteenth century up to the middle of the present century, Britain dominated India both economically and politically. Parts of the Arab world were also under her economic and political influence. After 1857 British suzerainty was finally established in India and in 1882 they occupied Egypt, one of the objects being the protection of their economic and political interests in the Indian Empire. The Ottoman Government had become weak both politically and economically and heavily indebted to European Powers, especially Britain. It was in fact the economic interest of Britain in the Ottoman Empire that kept 'the sick man of Europe' alive until the present century. Furthermore, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the final purchase of the majority of the shares of the Company by Benjamin Disraeli established the supremacy of the British in the commercial activities in the Arabian Sea. The British were now the main agents of trade between India and the Arab countries.

As a result of the policy followed by Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt, industrial, agricultural and technical developments took place in Egypt during the nineteenth century. Egypt became one of the important exporters of cotton. During the present century the exploitation of oil in the Arab countries turned them into important exporters of oil to the East and the West. It is difficult to survey here with any justification the vast amount of imports and exports that took place between India and the Arab world during this period. During the later half of the nineteenth century the beginnings of industrialization and better trade facilities could be observed in India. Fast developing ports, railway communications, the exploitation of coal, the beginnings of the cotton industry in Bombay and Ahmedabad—all these factors must have boosted up trade relations with the Arab coun-



tries. However, a thorough study and analysis of such trade relations still remains to be made. Yet, it may be observed that it was neither the Arab world nor India that benefited directly by this trade. India's economy was geared to British Imperialist interests. In fact indigenous industries and handicrafts were destroyed by the British, while the export of raw materials continued to feed the industries of England. Thus, the benefits accrued from Indo-Arab trade went directly into British pockets.

To give some idea of the volume of trade between India and the Arab world during the present century, we may point out that between the period 1930 and 1940 Indian exports to and imports from Egypt were approximately constant, but in 1941 they were almost thrice the value as compared to 1930.\* India's exports to 'Iraq during this period show a decline until 1939 but gradual increase from that year to 1941 when the value almost doubled as compared to 1930; whereas the imports from 'Iraq during this period show continuous decline.<sup>32</sup> India's exports to Syria and Lebanon fluctuated between 1931 and 1938; and imports during this period were comparatively negligible.<sup>33</sup> India's exports to Transjordan during the period 1937-1942 show a rapid rise, almost 22 times in 1942 as compared to the volume in 1937.<sup>34</sup> These figures have simply been given to indicate the state of trade relations during the period of world economic depression of the thirties and the first part of the Second World War.

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\**Statistical Handbook of Middle Eastern Countries*, p. 71:

	1930, 1936-41 (In £ E. 1000)						
	1930	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
Imports by India	1322	861	1055	876	792	1646	3182
Exports from India	1074	1262	1951	1538	1987	1771	3085

4. Quoted from Hadi Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
5. G. F. Hourani, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
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## CHAPTER IV

# GLIMPSES OF ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA IN ARABIC LITERATURE

### 1. GEOGRAPHY

#### (i) *Boundaries and Area*

FROM THE accounts of Arab historians, geographers, travellers and men of letters of the Middle Ages we gather the impression that the Arabs conceived of India as a vast country with fertile regions, deserts, mountains and large rivers. The Arab geographers usually divided India into two well demarcated regions. 1. *Sind*, beginning from Makran in the west up to the lower course of the Indus, and 2. *Hind*, from the Indus up to the borders of Burma. The term *Hind* was applied not only to India but also to practically all the countries of South-East Asia when addressed in general, e.g. '*the kings of Hind*' or '*the lands of Hind*'. India, for the Merchant Sulayman, was more extensive than China, in fact twice its size.<sup>1</sup> According to al-Ya'qubi, India formed the First Clime, and its boundaries in the east extended from the region of China and the Sea up to Daybul, and from 'Iraq up to the Arabian Sea and Hijaz.<sup>2</sup> Al-Mas'udi who visited India in A.D. 915-916 and travelled widely in Sind, Gujerat and Maharashtra describes India as a vast country comprising land, water and mountainous regions. The limits of India, according to him, extended up to the kingdom of the 'Maharaj' (Sumatra) in one direction and adjoined Khurasan, Sind and Tibet in the other. Sind was the border-land between 'the Kingdom of Islam' and India.<sup>3</sup> Its boundaries are described as follows: the Ocean in the east, Arabian Sea (in the west), Daybul (to the south) and the region adjacent to China in the north.<sup>4</sup> According to Abu 'l-Fida', "India is surrounded on the west by the Sea of Fars

and the rest of it are the borders of Sind and the parts adjacent to it; on the south it is surrounded by the Indian Ocean; on the east by a desert, which separates India from China; and on the north by (the lands of the Turkish clans)."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the boundaries of India are variously described by Arab writers but generally the Indian Ocean is placed to the east (south); a continuous mountainous range stretches along the north marking the northern boundaries (these are the Himalayan ranges); Tibet and China are placed to the north or the east. To the west of India are placed Kirman, Khurasan and Sijistan (southern Afghanistan). Al-Istakhri gives the measurement of India's length from Makran across Kanauj up to Tibet as being four months' journey, and its width from the Sea of Fars (Persian Gulf) across Kanauj as being about three months' journey.<sup>6</sup> As for its boundaries, to the east lay the Sea of Fars, to its west and south 'the Kingdom of Islam' and to its north, China. Tibet, according to this author, lay between China and India, (the land of) the Kharlukhs and the Toghuzghuz (tribes) and the Sea of Fars. Part of it was in India and part in China.<sup>7</sup> Sind, according to the same author, included Makran, Turan and al-Budha. Exactly the same boundaries are given by Ibn Hauqal who incorporated account of India's limits and boundaries is however found in Marvazi who says, "Their lands are numerous, with extensive areas, and the outlying parts of them are far-flung, stretching as they are down to the limit of habitation where cultivation and procreation cease and the existence of animals comes to an end."<sup>9</sup>

India lay on the great medieval sea-route of the East connecting the Persian Gulf ports with China. The Arab navigators of the early Middle Ages divided, for their navigational convenience, the seas lying along this route into what they termed "the Seven Seas". These were: 1. *Bahr Fars* (the Persian Gulf); 2. *Bahr al-Larwi*\* (the portion of the Arabian Sea stretching between Oman and the Laccadives); 3. *Bahr Harkand* (Bay of Bengal);<sup>10</sup> 4. *Bahr Kalah* (the Strait of Malacca);<sup>11</sup> 5. *Bahr Kandu-*

\*Named after the old name of Gujerat: 'Lar', see Sauvaget, *Akhbar*, p. 35, Note 4,3.



*ranga* (Panduranga);<sup>13</sup> 6. *Bahr Sanf* (the Sea of Champa)\*; and 7. *Bahr al-Sin* (the Sea of China).

(ii) *Climate and Soil*

According to the Merchant Sulayman India's rainfall was very heavy,<sup>13</sup> and according to Abu Zayd, the summer season was followed by continuous rains that lasted for three months; the life of the Indian people depended upon it.<sup>14</sup> But al-Mas'udi says that India had a winter and continuous rains in the month of December. "Anyone who passed winter in India," he says, "during the season when we have summer in our country, it is said, 'so and so passed winter (*yassara*) in India'."<sup>15</sup> According to al-Biruni, the people of Kathiawar divided the year into three parts: 1. *Varshakala*, beginning with the month of *Ashadha*; 2. *Sitakala* (i.e. the winter); and 3. *Ushna-Kala* (i.e. the summer).<sup>16</sup>

The Arabs were full of praise and admiration for the soil and climate of India in general. Al-Mas'udi describes the soil as being very fertile and rich. He says that the orange tree and the round citron were exported from India to the Middle East some time after A.D. 912. These plants were first cultivated in Oman and later in 'Iraq and Syria. Finally, they became quite popular and were grown by people in their homes in Tarsus and other parts of the Syrian frontier, Antioch and along the Syrian coast and in Palestine and Egypt. But having been cultivated in these countries they had lost the original flavour and colour which they possessed in India. This was due to the absence of the Indian climate, soil and water and the special favourable characteristics of that land.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Indian peacock, after being imported into the Islamic lands, hatched young ones that were much smaller in size than those found in India and had developed dirty and unpleasant colours little resembling those of these birds in India. But this change occurred in the male species only.<sup>18</sup> As an example of the good effect of Indian soil and climate on the imported plants, al-Mas'udi cites the coconut. He says it was originally *al-muql* (bdellium), but when it was imported and cultivated in India, it evolved into the coconut, due to the effect of India's soil and climate.<sup>19</sup>

\*The Kingdom of Champa lay between the Sea and the mountain all along the eastern coast of Indo-China (Sauvaget, *Akhbar*, pp. 44-45).

(iii) *Mountains*

The Himalayas were no doubt known to the Arab travellers and geographers of this period but they were rather vague about them as is evident from the descriptions of these ranges in their writings. Except for al-Biruni who gives their name as *Himavant*,<sup>20</sup> no other Arab writer seemed to have been acquainted with their proper name. Al-Idrisi, who never visited India but based his information partly on some contemporary travellers' accounts, calls the Himalayan ranges 'the mountain of arsenic and sulphur'. This name appears on his maps of India.<sup>21</sup> Among other mountains, the Arabs seemed to have been more familiar with the hills of Assam which they refer to as *Jibal Qamarun* (the mountains of Kamarupa);<sup>22</sup> Undiran<sup>23</sup> mountains (the Vindhya-range), the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats were also known to the Arabs. Again, they seemed to have been acquainted with the Girnar hills of Junagadh (Kathiawar) which was a great centre of pilgrimage.<sup>24</sup> Besides these there are quite a few other coastal mountains which were known to the Arabs and have been described by them.

(iv) *Rivers*

Of the Indian rivers, the Indus (Arabic: *Mihran*) was best known to the Arabs. Their accounts are full of details pertaining to it. This was quite natural, for since the beginning of the 8th century the Arabs had not only become the rulers of Sind but had settled down there. Hence the Indus and its tributaries were known to the Arabs through first-hand knowledge. They also wrote about the Ganges (Arabic: *Janjis* or *Kank*) but mainly as the sacred river of India well known for its temples and places of worship and where the devotees practised self-immolation. The Yamuna was less known and was, by some writers even confused with the Ganges. Then, the Brahmaputra (lower courses), Narmada, the Godawari and the Kistna were also known to them.<sup>25</sup> Besides these large rivers many small ones, specially those belonging to the Indian peninsula, are mentioned by these early Arab writers on India. The Indus and the Meghna\* are described by them as being navigable.

\*Ibn Battuta calls it 'the Blue river'. See *Travels*, p. 271.



(v) *Ports and Towns*

Some of the important Indian ports on the Western Coast of India with which the Arab navigators were acquainted, are described by Arab geographers and travellers, such as: Daybul,\* Baruj or Barus (Broach), Sindan,† Subara\*\* (Sopara, Bombay), Tana (Thana), Saymur,†† Sindabur,\*\*\* Hannaur (Honavar), Manjaror (Mangalor), Hili††† (Mt. Delly), Fandarayna\*\*\*\* (Panderavi) and Kulam Malay (Quilon). The main sea-ports of the Eastern Coast of India described by the Arabs were: Ballin (probably Negapatam), Kanja (Conjeevaram) and Samundar††††. The Coromandal Coast was called *al-Ma'bar* (the crossing point) for it was from here that the Arab sea-route to the East bifurcated at the port of Ballin. Some of the boats sailed straight for China, whereas others sailed northwards to Bengal and Assam. The Arab

\*It was an important medieval port of Sind situated near the modern port of Karachi (see *India*, p. 82).

†Sanjan, 50 miles north of Thana, Bombay.

\*\*Sopara, near Bassein, in the Thana district of Bombay.

††Modern Chaul in the Kolaba district of Bombay.

\*\*\*The Island and the bay of Goa (Gibb, *Travels*, Notes, pp. 363-364); Nainar identifies it with *Shadashivagad*, *Arab Geographers*, p. 74.

†††The name of the medieval Kingdom, Ili or Eli, has left a trace in Mount Delly. The medieval port is probably now represented by the village of Nileshwar, a few miles north of the promontory (Gibb, *Travels*, Notes p. 364).

\*\*\*\*Gibb identifies it with Panderani (*Travels*, p. 234); Nainar, identifies it with *Pantalayani*, *Pantalayini Kollam*, north of Quilandi (*Arab Geographers*, p. 35).

††††There is difference of opinion about the identification of this port but there is little doubt that it was one of the most important Indian ports visited by Arab merchants and sailors. V. Minorsky (*H.A.*, p. 241) places it south of Baruva and north of Ganjam. In 1957, an excavation team of Asutosh Museum, Calcutta University, discovered the remains of a two thousand three hundred year old city, identified with the great city of the port *Ganga ridae* (Bengal). Among the structural remains found was a slanting pavement probably representing a dockyard of the Morya-Sungap period. The civilization that flourished here continued down to the Pala period (8-12th century A.D.). (See 'Statesman', August 10, 1957, p. 7). India's account referring to the port of *Samundar* was written in the first half of the 12th century A.D., and the possibility of its identification with this old city of *Gange* should not be ruled out completely. However, the more probable identification is with *Sunur Kawan* (Sonargaon) of Ibn Battuta (*Travels*, p. 271; cf. Idrisi, *India*, p. 64).

boats also sailed non-stop from Muscat to Quilon in Kerala and it took them one month to reach India.<sup>26</sup>

The list of inland cities and towns of India described by Arab writers is very big. Here we may mention some of the more important places: Mansura (old Brahmanabad, Sind), Nirun (Hyderabad, Sind) and Multan; then *Madinat Qashmir* (Srinagar?), Qinnauij (Kanauij), Nahrwara (Patan), Asawal (Asapalli), Kanbaya (Cambay), Dada (Dhar), and Malwa (Mandu or Ujjain). Al-Biruni has given a very impressive list of Indian towns and has in some cases given their latitudes and longitudes also.<sup>27</sup> Among the towns mentioned by him are Tanjaur (Tanjore), Rameshar (Rameshwaram), Mandaribin (Mandurpattan, Mandapam), Somnat (Somnath), Dhar, Uzayn (Ujjain), Meghar (Mewar), Mahura (Mathura), Kalanjar, Kuwalir (Gwalior), Kajuraha (Khajuraho), Ajudha (Ajudhya), Banarasi (Varanashi), Batliputra (Patna), Munkeri (Monghyr), Quzdar (Khozdar), Arur (Rohri), Parsawar (Peshawar), Jeylam (Jhelum), Salkut (Sialkot), Rajkiri (Rajgiri), Sunnam, Mirat (Merut), Taneshar (Thanesar) and Adhistan (Srinagar). Other towns described by him are: Uwarihar (Uriyadesha), Prayak (Allahabad), Kanauij and Vayhind.\*

Abu'l-Fida, the 14th century Syrian prince-geographer was one of the first to mention Dilli (Delhi).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ibn Battuta, the Marco Polo of the Arabs who belonged to Morocco but passed many years of his life in India, records many names of contemporary towns and places of India, which are not found in the works of earlier Arab writers. For example, he mentions Daulatabad, the proposed capital of Muhammad b. Tughluq;<sup>29</sup> then Hansi,<sup>30</sup> Dihli (Delhi), Sudkawan (Satgaon), Sunurkawan (Sonargaon), Kul (Koel, old Aligarh), etc.<sup>31</sup>

#### (vi) Islands

The word "Jazira" in medieval Arabic was used both for an 'island' and a 'peninsula'. Thus, al-Maydh (Kathiawar), Kulam Malay (Quilon), etc. are described by Arab geographers as 'islands'. Among the Islands of India, the Maldives (*al-Dibajat*),†

\*Ohind lay between the Indus and the Kabul river, just above their confluence (Minorsky, *H. A.*, pp. 253-4).

†Lit. 'the islands' from Ssk. 'Diva' and Persian ending for plural 'jat' (Diba+jat).



Andaman and Nicobar (*Lankabalus*) are described in great detail. The Maldives were famous for boat-building activities and for the craftsmanship of the artisans who wove a shirt with its two sleeves, its gores and its pockets, all in one piece. These islands were ruled by a queen whose treasures comprised cowry-shells, and the main merchandise of the inhabitants was shell of the sea-turtle, out of which ornaments and combs were made. The womenfolk went about with their heads uncovered, with plaited hair and wearing many combs in them. The queen and her husband lived on the island called Anb-riya.\*

Almost all writers who described these Islands mention the fact that they were ruled by a woman. Al-Mas'udi says that this was the island's custom since ancient times. They were never ruled by a man.<sup>32</sup> Al-Muqaddasi seems to exaggerate when he says that the queen appeared before her subjects seated naked on a throne, wearing a crown,<sup>33</sup> while Ibn Battuta who had visited these Islands in 1344 and held the post of a *qadi* (judge) there, relates that "the womenfolk did not cover their hands, not even their queens did so, and they combed their hair and gathered it on one side. Most of them wore only an apron from their waist to the ground, the rest of the body being uncovered". He claims to have put an end to this practice and ordered them to clothe themselves fully. Writing in the first half of the 12th century, al-Idrisi, whose information was probably based on some traveller's report, gives the name of this queen as *Damhara*, probably a metathesis of *Dharma*.<sup>34</sup> But Ibn Battuta, two centuries later, gives the name of the then queen of the Islands as *Khadija*<sup>35</sup> which shows that during the intervening period the government of the Island had passed from Hindu to Muslim hands.

The Arab merchant boats on the way to China also called at the Andaman and the Nicobar Islands. Sulayman gives a vivid account of these Islands. The Nicobar Islands, he says, were inhabited by a large population who wore few clothes and when the boats passed by them, they rowed up to them in small and big canoes made of a single piece of wood to sell coconuts, sugarcane, bananas, coconut-wine (toddy) and some amber. They purchased iron from the Arabs but the transaction was

\**Al-Idrisi, India*, p. 24; this Island may be identified with Ptolemy's "Irene (Eirene) 120° long. 2° 30 lat. S." (*ibid.*, p. 114).

done by signs for they did not follow the language of the Arabs. The natives of these Islands are described as white-coloured and having scanty beards, and the Islands are called *Lanjabalus* by the Arab writers.<sup>36</sup> The inhabitants of the Andaman Islands are described by Sulayman as cannibals, having curly hair, ugly faces and long legs. They did not possess any canoes, and if they had done so, they would have eaten up those who passed by them.<sup>37</sup>

(vii) *Flora*

Among the fruits of India citron is specially described by the early Arab writers.<sup>38</sup> Ibn Battuta says that sweet oranges were in plenty but the sour variety was rare and there was a third variety with a taste between sweet and sour about the size of a citron (*al-lim*) which he relished very much.<sup>39</sup> Jack-fruit was also liked by the Arabs and we find details about it in their writings.\* Mango is also described in some detail. Ibn Battuta says that green mango was picked and mixed with salt; it then tasted like a lemon and was used as a condiment. A little was taken after every morsel of food.† Again, *mahuwa*\*\* according to him, was found in abundance in Delhi, and some other parts of India, and since figs were not available, Ibn Battuta used to eat dried *mahuwa* in its place. Its oil, according to him was used for burning candles.<sup>40</sup> Another fruit described by many of the writers is the sour lemon (*al-limuna*).<sup>41</sup> Figs were rare in India and grapes were few according to the Arabic accounts. Grapes, according to Ibn Battuta, blossomed and bore fruit twice a year. Other fruits mentioned by him are *tendu*,

\*Idrisi, *India*, p. 34; Ibn Battuta, *Voyages*, III, p. 127. This is *kathal*, called by the Arabs by its Malayalam name *Chakka* (Ar. *al-shaki wa'l-barki*).

†Idrisi, *India*, pp. 34, 35; Ibn Battuta, *Voyages*, III, pp. 125-126. The Arabs called it *al-anbaj*. It is compared with the peach in taste. See Istakhri, p. 173; Ibn Hauqal, *Kitab Surat al-Ard*, ed. J. H. Kramers, Leiden 1938, p. 320; al-Maqdisi, p. 482.

\*\**Bassia latifolia* or *longifolia*; from its sweet flowers a spirituous liquor is distilled and the nuts afford an oil used instead of butter (see John Shakespear, *A Dictionary of Hindustani and English, and English and Hindustani*, London 1849).



*kasira* (*kaseru*) and pomegranates.\* Besides these, there are a variety of Indian fruits described by the Arab writers like sugarcane, bananas, date-palms, peaches, mulberries, jujube, quince, pears, apples, and green and yellow melons.<sup>42</sup>

Of the grains a large variety find place in Arab descriptions. The grains of the kharif crop, according to Ibn Battuta, were: *al-kudhru* (a kind of millet) found in abundance; *al-qal*, *al-shamakh*,† a food of the good people and of the poor; *al-mash* (Indian peas), *al-munj* (moong), *Lubya* (haricots), *al-mut* (mooth) and barley. Grains of the rabi crop were: wheat, chick-peas and lentils. Rice had three crops in the year and India produced a large grain of rice. Sesame and sugarcane were cultivated in the kharif season. *Shamakh*, according to Ibn Battuta, was cooked with buffalo-milk.<sup>43</sup> The food of the people of Nahrwara (Patan, Gujarat), according to Idrisi, consisted of rice, chick-peas, beans, haricots, lentils, Indian peas, fish and animals that died a natural death.<sup>44</sup>

Among the different types of flowering trees, woods and other plants bamboo is commonly described by all.\*\* It grew in abundance in the mountains and plains of Thana. *Tabashir* (*tavakshira*, Bar-milk), according to Idrisi, was adulterated by mixing it with burnt elephant bones but the pure kind was obtained from the roots of this prickly Indian reed.<sup>45</sup> The plant whose bark the ancient Indians used as paper is mentioned by al-Mas'udi as *kadhi*. According to Qadi al-Rashid b. al-Zubayr *Dah-mi* (King Dharmapala of Bengal, A.D. 769-801 or 815) wrote to the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun on a bark of this tree. Al-Mas'udi describes this tree as being very beautiful in colour and pure in its fragrance and writes that the Indian and Chinese kings wrote to each other on the barks of this plant.†† *Tanbul* (betel) is said

\*Ibn Battuta, *Voyages*, III, pp. 125-129. *Tenda* is *Diospyros ebenum* or *glutinosa* (see Shakespear, *op. cit.*) *Kaseru* is a fibrous root eaten as a fruit; *Scripus kysoor* (Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Voyages*, III, p. 129).

†This is *Sanwak* (*Panicum frementaceum*). It is called *sanwa* or *sanwan* in eastern districts of U.P. and *sanwak* in its western districts and in the Punjab.

\*\*Earliest description is found in Ibn Khur., see p. 62.

††Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, II, p. 202; Qadi Rashid, *Kitab al-Dhakha'ir wa 'l-Tahuf*, pp. 24-25. The bark used as paper was called *bhojpattar* which came out of a tree said to be a kind of birch (*Betula bhojpatra*) used in

to have been very popular in the 10th century in the Yemen and Hijaz, specially in Mecca, as we learn from al-Mas'udi. It was probably exported to those countries and the Arabs were very fond of chewing this leaf.\* Indian cotton is described by al-Qalqashandi as being superior in quality to that grown in Baghdad.<sup>46</sup> *Baqgam* (Brazil-wood) grew in abundance in southern India.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the coconut-tree is said to have been in abundance. Sulayman speaks of the coconut wine being used in the Nicobar islands and says that "if it is drunk soon after it is extracted from the coconut tree, it is as sweet as honey, but if it is left for an hour it turns into wine, and if it is left for several days it turns into vinegar. This is obviously a description of toddy."<sup>48</sup> Ibn Hauqal calls this wine made in Konkan *al-atwaq*.<sup>49</sup> *'Ud* (aloes-wood) grew mainly in the mountains of Kamarupa in Assam. It was floated down from there to Samundar (Sonargaon?) by means of rivers.<sup>50</sup> According to al-Biruni, the best aloes-wood in the world was that called *Bankali* (Bengali). He goes into the details of how it was floated down from the Kamarup mountains, preserved and cleaned by the officials of the Sultan.<sup>51</sup> The Arab writers mention a variety of Indian vegetables and aromatic plants. These include cucumber, pumpkin, badinjan, turnip, carrot, asparagus, ginger, garden-beet, onion, garlic, fennel, thyme, cardamom, tamarind† and pepper.<sup>52</sup> The pepper-plant was particularly noted by the Arab travellers for what seemed to them an interesting phenomenon. During the rainy season the leaves curled over the clusters of the fruit to protect it from getting damp and when the rains stopped the leaves lifted away from it.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the banyan tree is described with great amazement and interest.<sup>54</sup>

Among the Indian flowers, al-Qalqashandi enumerates rose, nenuphar, violet, *ban*, (Ben-tree), narcissus, jasmine, and the blossom of henna.<sup>55</sup>

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making *hugqa* snacks (Shakespeare, *op. cit.*). But the correct form of this word (*Kadhi*) seems to be *tari* (from *tar*, *Borassus flabelliformis*), see al-Biruni, *A.I.*, I, p. 171.

\*Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, II, p. 84. *Tanbul* is the leaf of *Piper betle* commonly known as *pan* in Hindi.

†The English word is derived from Arabic *thamar hindi* (the Indian fruit). This is *'imli* in Hindi.



(viii) *Fauna*

Of all the Indian animals, the elephant attracted the greatest attention of the medieval Arab writers. According to some the best variety and the tallest was found in *al-Aghbab* in the South (the coastal regions facing Ceylon). This variety was ten to eleven cubits tall and the Kings of India purchased it at high prices, but in other parts the tallest was generally nine cubits high.<sup>56</sup> Elephants were also found in large numbers in the country called *Urishin* in Southern India, which was ruled by a queen, *raniya*.<sup>\*</sup> Elephants were used for various house jobs by the Indians. According to Buzurg b. Shahriyar some of the jobs they performed were: sweeping the floor, sprinkling water on the floor, threshing grain, filling in water, uprooting grass, etc. Such trained elephants were very costly.<sup>57</sup> Al-Mas'udi gives long descriptions of the special qualities of the Indian elephant, making the account interesting by relating anecdotes connected with it.<sup>58</sup> The Indian rhinoceros is another wild animal that finds a prominent place in Arabic writings. It was found in large numbers in Assam and was coveted by Arab merchants for its valuable horn. The inside of the horn when split open, was found to be very attractive containing shapes and images resembling human beings, birds and such other objects. The Chinese manufactured waist-belts of these horns whose prices varied between 3,000 and 4,000 *dinars*. Connected with the rhinoceros were some fantastic stories that were current among the Arabs of this period. For example, this animal lived in its mother's womb for seven years, and finally when it grew large, it cut open his mother's womb and came out, while the mother died. But such tales were rejected by writers like al-Mas'udi, as being baseless.<sup>59</sup> Idrisi says, on the authority of al-Jayhani, that Indian kings used the rhinocero's horn for making handles of knives used at meals.<sup>60</sup>

Among the animals of India, the two-humped camel of Sind is mentioned by Arab writers. This breed was exported to Khurasan, Persia and other countries.<sup>61</sup> Al-Biruni mentions a wild animal of Konkan (Maharashtra) called *sharava* (Ssk. *Sarabha*), probably a wild boar. There was another animal found in the

<sup>\*</sup>In *Khur.*, p. 67; Idrisi, *India*, pp. 69-71; there is no certainty as to the location of *Urishin*, but it has tentatively been identified by me with Orissa (See Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, pp. 127-128); cf. *Marvazi*, pp. 46-47.

rivers of South India which according to him was known by several names: *graha*, *jalatantu*, and *tandwah*. From his description of the animal it seems that it was the octopus. Al-Biruni also mentions a fish called *burlu* which he thought was the dolphin or one of its varieties.<sup>62</sup> Among the domestic animals, water-buffaloes, cows, goats and sheep are enumerated by al-Qalqashandi. Two types of horses are described: the Arabian and the pack-horse. Mules and donkeys are also mentioned but with the comment that the Indians did not like to ride them.<sup>63</sup> Several types of birds like the domestic fowl, pigeons, parrots, cranes and bulbuls\* are described by these writers, but the honoured place is given to the peacock.

### (ix) Commercial Goods

Cotton cloth manufactured in India was always prized by the Arab merchants in medieval times. Indian cotton cloth, in fact, was the most valuable commercial commodity from very ancient times. The Arab merchants particularly praised India's skill in cloth manufacture and cited the variety produced in Bengal in the Kingdom of Dharmapala. Writing in the first half of the 9th century, the Merchant Sulayman says that he had seen this cloth in his Kingdom. It was so fine and delicate that it could be passed through the circle of a ring.<sup>64</sup> The description fits in with the famous muslin of Dacca, the manufacture of which ceased only with the arrival of the British in India. Ibn Khurradadhbih compares this cloth to velvet.<sup>64\*</sup>

The Arabs' image of medieval India was that of a country that abounded in mineral wealth, aromatic plants, spices and perfumes, precious stones, pearls and other valuable commodities.<sup>65</sup>

## 2. RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

The Arabs of the medieval period looked at India not only as a great country where the sciences and arts flourished and from where they derived their inspiration and knowledge. They found in her a home and fountainhead of many religions and philosophies and a source of the then current religions of the East.

\*Probably the shrike (*Lanius boulboul*). See Shakespeare, *op. cit.*



Sulayman relates that India gave to the Chinese their religion and various forms of idol-worship (in fact, Buddhism).<sup>65</sup> The Arab travellers and scholars began surveying the religious set-up of India by about the beginning of the 9th century.

India was then passing through a period of a deep religious crisis, reform and spiritual regeneration. The teachings of Shankaracharya, his devotional hymns and concept of the Absolute had introduced a new life and spirit into the Hindu society of the period. His philosophy of Advaita, the reorganisation of the monastic orders and the establishment of the four great pontifical seats in the four corners of India,<sup>67</sup> revitalized and stabilized Hinduism in India. Buddhism as a distinct religion and philosophy had ceased to exist. It was, on the contrary, absorbed into the fold of Hinduism and to a foreigner and a layman, indistinguishable from the other religious practices. The only visible feature to the Arab was its current ascetic form, *Sramana* (*Shamani*). Buddhism is regarded by Shahrastani as one of the three sub-divisions of Brahmanism, the other two being *tanasukh* (metempsychosis) and 'meditation'; this suggests that the Arab account must have been written some time after the theoretical absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism had taken place. In the words of K. M. Panikkar "by the end of the tenth century Hinduism had asserted its universal supremacy in India, reorganized its popular doctrines, provided itself with a higher philosophy which found general acceptance among the intellectual classes and absorbed into its fold the religion of Buddha. From Kashmir to Cape Comorin, the worship of Shiva, Vishnu and the Devi prevailed and the background of philosophy accepted without question the main doctrines of Paramatma, Jivatma, Maya and re-incarnation in a society organized on the basis of caste and the Dharma-sastras."<sup>68</sup>

### (i) Religious Sects and Creeds

The earliest Arab report on the religions of India was compiled by the envoy sent to India at the request of the Barmakid vizier Yahya b. Khalid.\* This report was utilized by the later

\*V. Minorsky fixed the date of the report at about A.D. 800 (Minorsky, *Marvazi*, p. 125).

Arab writers extensively and is extant in many of the works of the period, in some briefly and in detail in others. Among those who utilized it were Ibn Khurradadhbih, al-Jayhani, Mutahhar, Marvazi, the Sicilian geographer of the Court of the Norman King Roger II, al-Idrisi, and many others. The religious beliefs and practices and the various current forms of worship are dealt with in it in a classified form. To the simple monotheist Arab reporter whose name, unfortunately, is not recorded in the available redaction of the treatises, the whole panorama of Indian religious life must have been puzzling. He must have seen it from the point of view of his own religion. Thus, it seems that his method of analysis and of fixing a place for each of the systems of thought and sects was to consider them in the general pattern of his own belief, viz., did or did they not believe in the Unity of God? or did they possess an apostle or a divine, revealed book or not? This was but natural. According to this report, therefore, there were ninety-nine different sects and cults practised in India in the ninth century, a figure which, interestingly enough, coincided with the ninety-nine names of God (*al-asma' al-husna*). Stress on numbers is also laid when the castes are described as being *seven* in all. I suspect the reporter must have been affected by the Pythagorean philosophy and may have belonged to an Isma'ili sect of the early Islamic period.

Of the various writers, al-Marvazi presents to us a very detailed account of India's religions. He enumerates ninety-nine creeds grouped under forty-four religions. Among them were: 1. those who believed in the Creator and the Prophets; 2. those who confirmed the existence of the Creator, but had no faith in the Apostles and the Prophets; 3. those who had no faith either in the Creator or in the Apostles; 4. again, those who rejected everything, but confirmed the truth of Retribution and Punishment and who, according to the writer were *Shamana*;\* 5. some others who maintained that Retribution and Punishment consisted in rebirth in happiness or in misfortunes and that Paradise and the Fire are apportioned to one's actions and are not lasting.<sup>69</sup>

The Brahmins are counted among those who believed in the Creator and thought that Vasudeva (*Basdiw*) was God's

\*Sramanas, Buddhist ascetics and mendicants.



Apostle unto them. He came to them in a human form as an envoy of God, but without a (divine) Book.<sup>70</sup>

To this category also belonged the *Mahadaviya* (the adepts of Mahadeva). They were forbidden to kill animals, to marry and to acquire property, their sustenance being in alms. They are described as wonderful magicians.<sup>71</sup>

Another sect called the *Kabaliya* (*Kapalika*) believed that their apostle was an angel called *Shib* (Siva). He ordered them to make a round object in the shape of a phallus, two cubits long and a cubit in diameter, called *shibling*, which they were asked to worship because they assumed that the phallus was the cause of procreation in the world.<sup>72</sup>

To this group also belonged the *Ramaniya*, the followers of Raman (Rama) who is described as a tyrannous king and claimed to be God's envoy.<sup>73</sup>

Then there were the *Ravaniya*, the followers of Ravana, who was an intermediary between the Creator and themselves.<sup>74</sup>

Then came the *Bhadr.riya* who grew long hair, kept their chests and backs naked and girded their waists with chains. They went on a pilgrimage to a mountain called Jurghar (Junagadh).<sup>75</sup>

Among the idol worshippers were the *Maha-Kaliya* who worshipped the idol called Mahakal.<sup>76</sup>

Another sect was called the *Divathriya* (?); this probably referred to the festival for the women called *Gaurtr* (gauri-trtiya?) which is holy to Gauri, i.e., Devi, the wife of Siva.<sup>77</sup>

*Dahkiniya* (?) was another sect, the followers of which made an idol in the shape of a woman and offered human and animal sacrifices to her.<sup>78</sup>

Among other idol worshippers described by these writers are: *Jalabhaktiya*, the worshippers of water,<sup>79</sup> *Aknhutriya* (\**Agni-hotra*), the worshippers of Fire. The worshippers of the moon fasted half of each month and broke fast only on seeing the new moon. Then there were the worshippers of the Sun.<sup>80</sup>

Another strange sect was the *Bhabarniya* (?) whose custom it was to exhume the dead bodies from their graves in an horrible condition for they did not bury their dead properly.

In the second category are included the worshippers who believed in the Creator and Retribution and Punishment but not in God's envoys. They claimed that God had invited the people to worship him and put in their hearts the love of good and hate of

evil, thus rendering them independent of any body, so that they should not do to anyone what they themselves would not accept from others. They believed in reaching Paradise through exertion of mind and chastisement of the body.<sup>81</sup>

There were some who believed that True Reality could be attained through the destruction of the body and the liberation of the soul. Among these were *Rishiya* who annihilated their passions through long meditation. They lived in mountains and fed on fruit and herbs. They kept their eyes closed.

Another sect belonging to this group was that of the *N.kri-niya* (\**Nigada-bandha*?). They wore iron fetters, shaved their heads and beards and hid only the privy parts. They put iron round their waists up to the breast lest their bellies burst out from abundance of knowledge.<sup>82</sup>

To this category also belonged the *K.nkabatriya* (\**Gangaya-triya*). They were found all over India.

Then there were the *Rajtartiya* (\**Raja-martya*?) whose religion was to serve the King and to strengthen his power.<sup>83</sup>

There were also the *Jirambardhara* (*Cirambaradhara*) who wore bark garments, and *Amirk.jariya* (\**Mrga-cara*) who resembled the wild animals for they walked on all fours and ate herbs with their mouths.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from these there were those who entered fire and water and applied hot stones to their bodies, carved their limbs or burnt themselves in dry cow-dung or in ovens.<sup>85</sup> Others, called *anashaniya*\* starved themselves to death. The *Tirshuli* threw themselves on an iron trident (*trisula*) standing by a banyan tree at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna.† Some people also allowed themselves to be pecked to death by wild birds.<sup>86</sup>

The above account of Marvazi on Indian sects was also related, briefly or in detail, by many Arab writers on India before and after him. But a more authentic, scholarly and intelligent interpretation of India's religious thought and practices was pre-

\*From *anasa* "not eating, or *anashaniya* connected with *anasana* of the *Fihrist* (Minorsky, *Marvazi*, p. 140).

† *Ibid*, p. 46. Al-Biruni says that at the junction of the Yamuna and the Ganges is a great tree called *Prayaga*, a tree of the species called *vata* (modern Hindi: *bad*). "Here the Brahmans and Kshatriyas are in the habit of committing suicide by climbing up the tree and throwing themselves into the Ganges." *A.I.*, II, pp. 170-171; cf. al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, II, 81.



pared by al-Biruni in the beginning of the 11th century. It is not possible to recapitulate or even to give a brief summary in the present work of the long philosophical discussions and precious information incorporated in his scientific writings. To fully appreciate the extent and depth of his knowledge and observations on the glorious past of India, and his familiarity with India's scientific, religious and philosophical literature, the reader is recommended the perusal of his numerous works. The particular volume that he devoted to India is entitled, "*A Verification of the Things Accepted by Reason or Rejected, that are Said in Relation to India*".

The originality of al-Biruni's work both in its content and presentation is unparalleled in Arabic literature pertaining to ancient and medieval India. He not only recorded what information he could gather personally, but took pains to study many aspects of India's religions and the various systems of Indian philosophy so as to be able to present them in his own words. He then compared them with those of the Greeks, Iranians, the Arabs and with Islam, Christianity and Sufism. We may give below a few examples from his writings.

Differentiating between the beliefs of the literate and the illiterate people in general he says, "The belief of educated and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses, and are content with derived rules, without caring for details, especially in question of religion and law, regarding which opinions and interests are divided."

"The Hindus believe with regard to God that he is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by freewill, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him." He then goes on to illustrate his interpretation of the Hindu concept of God by giving extracts from the ancient texts "lest the reader should think that our account is nothing but heresy",<sup>87</sup> and cites *Patanjali*, *Gita* and *Samkhya*. He says that the educated people called God *Isvara* (*ishfar*), which meant "self-sufficing, beneficent, who gives without receiving."<sup>88</sup> Since al-Biruni, while writing in the literary and scientific language of the time, namely Arabic,

had also in view and addressed a community the fundamental tenet of whose religion was the unity of God (*tauhid*), he made a point to explain to them the Hindu concept of the unity of God. So, he says, "They consider the unity of God as absolute, but that everything beside God which may appear as a unity is really a plurality of things. The existence of God they consider as a real existence, because everything that exists, exists through him. It is not impossible to think that the existing beings are *not* and that he *is*, but it is impossible to think that he *is not* and that they *are*."<sup>89</sup>

For the concepts prevalent during the time of his sojourn in India among the generality of the Hindus and the masses of the people he uses the epithet: "simply abominable."<sup>90</sup> Hence, advising the educated among them he says, "Every religious sentence destined for the people at large must be carefully worded", or else their formulations may prove incomprehensible and the common man may misconstrue them. For example, if a learned man compared God to *a point*, the common man may not believe that God could be so small. Nay, he may insist that he is twelve fingers long and ten fingers broad, or, if it is said that "God comprehends the universe so that nothing is concealed from him", the uneducated man "will at once imagine that this comprehending is effected by means of eye-sight; that eye-sight is only possible by means of an eye, and that two eyes are better than only one; and in consequence he will describe God as having a thousand eyes, meaning to describe his omniscience." Al-Biruni points out that such "hideous fictions" were sometimes met with among the Hindus of his time, especially among those castes who were not allowed to occupy themselves with science.<sup>91</sup> Then, while the educated class detested anthropomorphisms, the common people and the members of the single sects used them extensively and even "speak of wife, son, daughter, of the rendering pregnant and other physical processes, all in connection with God."<sup>92</sup> Although such classes and concepts existed in abundance, nobody really minded them, for they did not represent the true Hindu religion and philosophy. The essential point of the Hindu world of thought, he says, was that which the Brahmans thought and believed, for they were specially trained for preserving and maintaining their religion.<sup>93</sup>

A glance at al-Biruni's work on India would show what a wide variety of subjects it covers on religion and philosophy rang-



ing from the unity of the whole creation, soul (*purusha*) general matter (*avyakta*), *vyakta*, *prakriti*, the compound and simple elements to the supreme cause of the soul's action and the relationship of the soul with matter.<sup>54</sup> His discussions become more absorbing and illuminating when he uses parallels and similar concepts found in the philosophies of other nations to illustrate his point. Throughout the work he displays a sense of critical appreciation of Hindu thought and if he is critical, which he is in many places, the criticism is constructive, arising out of his deep regard and admiration for India.

(ii) *Metempsychosis, Retribution and Punishment, Moksha, etc.*

Metempsychosis is one of the subjects which many Arab writers deal with in their books on India. It was widely recognized in the Arab literary circles of the Middle Ages as a distinguishing mark of Hindu religious thought. While Shahrastani (d. 1153) treats it as one of the three sub-divisions of Brahmanism,<sup>55</sup> obviously a misrepresentation, al-Biruni explains the concept by example and its significance in Hindu religious thought. He says that just as the *Shahada*, i.e., *There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is his Prophet*, is the shibboleth of Islam, the Trinity that of Christianity and the institute of the Sabbath that of Judaism, so *tanasukh* (metempsychosis) is the shibboleth of the Hindu religion. "Therefore he who does not believe in it does not belong to them, and is not reckoned as one of them."<sup>56</sup> The concept of *tanasukh*, the ultimate aim of the souls which are imperishable, in migration from one body to the other and from one world to the other (the worlds of *reward* and *punishment*) is explained by al-Biruni in the following words:

"This migration lasts until the object aimed at has been completely attained both for the soul and matter; the *lower* aim being the disappearance of the shape of matter, except any such new formation as may appear desirable; the *higher* aim being the ceasing of the desire of the soul to learn what it did not know before, the insight of the soul into the nobility of its own being and its independent existence, its knowing that it can dispense with matter after it has become acquainted with the mean nature of matter and the instability of its shapes, with all that which matter offers to the senses, and with the truth of the tales about its delights. Then the soul turns away from matter; the connecting links

are broken, the union is dissolved. Separation and dissolution take place, and the soul returns to its home, carrying with itself as much of the bliss of knowledge as sesame develops grains and blossoms, afterwards never separating from its oil. The intelligent being, intelligence and its object, are united and become one."<sup>97</sup> He then buttresses his elucidation of the concept with the dialogues between Vasudeva and Arjuna on the subject and with extracts from *Patanjali* and other texts. He also compares the views of Mani, Plato and Proclus and the doctrines of the Sufis which are similar. He then goes on to describe the beliefs of the Hindus about the different worlds (*loka*) wherein the soul resides, namely, *svarloka*, i.e. paradise where man is to receive his reward, *nagaloka* (the world of the serpents, or hell) where he is to receive punishment and the *madhyaloka* and *manushyaloka* wherein we live and have to earn. In *svarloka* or *nagaloka* man receives "the full recompense of his deeds during a certain length of time corresponding to the duration of his deeds, but in either of them there is only the soul, the soul free from the body."<sup>98</sup> There is yet another world called *tiryagloka*, the irrational world of plants and animals, through the individuals of which the soul has to wander in the metempsychosis until it reaches the human being, rising by degrees from the lowest kinds of the vegetable world to the highest classes of the sensitive world. This is for those who do not deserve to rise to heaven and to sink as low as hell.<sup>99</sup> Al-Biruni then enumerates the different types of sins which the Hindus abhorred and the different categories of hells deserved by men committing these sins. There were 88,000 such hells according to *Vishnu-Purana*<sup>1</sup>. But there were other views about retribution and punishment held by the Hindus besides the above, e.g., the author of the book *Samkhya* did "not consider the reward of paradise as a special gain, because it has an end and is not eternal."<sup>2</sup> As against the above views held mainly by the educated class, there were popular and traditional views, for the common man could not conceive of the soul in the same way as the educated man could. For example, one view was that the cause of the agony of death is the soul's waiting for a shape which is to be prepared, and until this is originated as the embryo in a mother's womb or the seed in the earth, it does not depart the body, or, another view that the soul does depart the body but goes and rests in another body prepared



in haste which is called *ativahika*. The soul stays in this body for a complete year in the greatest agony, no matter whether it has deserved to be rewarded or to be punished. Al-Biruni compares it with the Persian concept of *al-Barzakh*, an intermediary stage between the periods of acting and earning and that of receiving the reward.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, al-Biruni deals with numerous other concepts and beliefs besides metempsychosis in his celebrated work on India, e.g. *moksha* and the different means to achieve it as shown in *Patanjali* and *Gita*,<sup>4</sup> the different classes of the spiritual beings, the *Devas*, *Pitaras*, *Bhutas*, *Rishis* and *Munis* and the beliefs connected with them; then the *three primary forces* that exist in *hayula* (the middle between matter and the spiritual divine ideas that are above matter, a bridge from above to below), namely, *Brahman* or *Prajapati*, *Narayana* and *Rudra* and the primary source of everything, *Vishnu*.<sup>5</sup>

### (iii) *The Caste System*

As in the case of the religious sects described above the majority of the Arab writers on the caste system of India, based their accounts on the original report drawn up by the envoy of Yahya b. Khalid. This report enumerates *seven races*,\* in all; the first place is given to *al-Shakthariya*, then follow the four castes, the *Brahmana*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaisya* and the *Sudra*, and the last place is given to the *Domba* and the *Candala*. *Al-Shakthariya*<sup>6</sup> are described as "the noblest, and all the castes prostrate themselves before them, while they do not do so before any one else. The king belongs to them."<sup>7</sup> "The Brahmans", according to Marvazi, "have the leadership under the king. They prostrate themselves before the Sumani, but the latter do not do so before them. Some of those who belong to this caste do not drink wine or intoxicating drinks."<sup>8</sup> Additional information is given by al-Idrisi, whose account was mainly based on the larger edition of Ibn Khurradadhbih: "They are the devotees of India. They dress in leopard-skins or skins of other (animals). Sometimes it so hap-

\*The term generally used is '*ajnas*', and it was probably a translation of the word *jataka* which according to al-Biruni meant *al-mawalid* (births). V. Minorsky translated '*ajnas*' as "races (castes)". See Marvazi, pp. 26, 39; cf. Idrisi, *India*, pp. 36, 145-146.

pens that one of them stands up with a staff in his hand and people gather round him; thus he keeps standing for a whole day until evening, giving a sermon to the people, reminding them of Almighty God and describing to them the affairs of all the peoples that have perished in the past.... They worship idols believing in them as mediators between themselves and Almighty God."\* The Kshatriyas "drink up to three bowls of wine only, and do not drink immoderately, fearing that they might not remain in their senses. This class marries into the Brahmans, while the Brahmans do not marry into them."<sup>9</sup> According to Marvazi, the Brahmans do not give (their own women) in marriage to them but marry theirs.<sup>10</sup> The Sudra "are agriculturists and husbandmen. The Kshatriyas marry their (women) and give them theirs, while the Brahmans marry theirs but do not give them (their own)."<sup>11</sup> The Vaisya "are craftsmen and tradesmen. None of the enumerated castes intermarries with them."<sup>12</sup> Then follow the Candala who are described as singers and players. "Their women are beautiful and sometimes Brahmans become infatuated with them so as to abandon for them their religion (but otherwise) none of the castes mentioned touches them."<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the Domba "who have a dark complexion and are performers and musicians. People treat them as Candalas, but the latter do not mix or intermarry with them."<sup>14</sup>

The ancient Greek writers on India also divide the Hindu society into seven, but it is very unlikely that this Arabic report had anything to do with the accounts of the Greeks. Arrian's *Indica* based on Megasthenes and Eratosthenes divides the people of India into 'about seven castes': 'the Sophists' (Brahmans), 'the tillers of the soil', 'herdsmen', 'handicraftsmen and retail-dealers', 'the warriors', 'superintendents' who belonged to the intelligence service of the king and, lastly 'the councillors of state.'<sup>15</sup> Pliny (Gaius Plinius Secundus, c. A.D. 23-79) arranges the various groups as belonging to "separate occupation".<sup>16</sup> The Arabs' reason for grouping the caste into seven may have been the same as that of the Greeks, namely, astrological. The number 'seven' had great significance both for the Greeks and later for the Arabs.

\*Idrisi, *India*, p. 37. The staff-bearers dressed in leopard-skins, etc. may be identified with the *Dasa-nami Dandins*, the order of Saiva ascetics said to have been founded by Sankaracarya (S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, p. 147).



Al-Biruni draws a different and better picture of the caste system prevalent during his time; he enumerates the four main ones, followed by *Antaza* (*Antyaja*) who were functional and not reckoned amongst any class (*tabaqat*\*) except the artisans. They were: the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver. They intermarried with each other freely except the fuller, shoemaker, and weaver. The four classes did not live with them together in the same place, so they lived on the outskirts of the towns. Then there were the Hadi, Domba, Candala and the *Bad-hatau* (*Sic*) who were not reckoned among any caste but were occupied with dirty work like cleansing of the villages and other services. They were considered as a single race (*jins*) distinguished by their work, and were treated as outcastes. The *Hadi* were best spoken of because they kept themselves free from everything unclean. The *Domba* played the lute and sang, while the *Candala* engaged in the killing (of animals) and the inflicting of judicial punishments as a trade. The worst of the lot were the *Bad-hatau*† who not only devoured the flesh of dead animals but even of dogs and other beasts.

The classes, points out al-Biruni, were called *barana* (*varna*), i.e. 'colours' by the Hindus and, from a genealogical point of view, *jataka*, i.e., births. The classes were four from the very beginning, he says, and the highest among them were the Brahmana who, according to the Hindu scriptures,\*\* were created from the head of Brahman. The next in order were the Kshatriya who were created from his shoulders and hands. They were followed by

\*Sachau translates *tabaqat* as 'castes' which does not seem to represent the true connotation of the Arabic term used by al-Biruni. "Classes" is a better translation.

†V. Minorsky suggests the origin of the word from *vadhya*, 'a criminal' in Arabic *badhyu* with final *u* instead of *a*, like in *vata>baru* (*Marvazi*, p. 123); Colebrooke suggested *Bediyas* (Sachau, *Al-beruni's India*, Annotations, p. 293).

\*\*The scriptures referred to must be the later portion of the *Rig-Veda*, the *Purushasukta* (hymn of the *Primordial Male*), which is the earliest source on the subject (See R. P. Masani, "Caste and the Structure of Society," in *The Legacy of India*, ed. by G. T. Garratt, London, 1938, p. 131). There was a lacuna in al-Biruni's text which Sachau has filled in with the help of Manu's *Dharmasastra* (i, 87): *mukha-bahu-uru-paj-janam* (Sachau, *A.I.*, Annotations, p. 293).

the Vaisya who were created from his thigh, and lastly, the Sudra, from his feet. But as Brahman was only another name for the force called *nature*, and the head being the highest part of the animal body, the *Brahmana* were considered by the Hindus as "the very best of mankind". Yet, although these "classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mix together in the same houses and lodgings."<sup>17</sup> According to some Hindus the *Brahmana* and the *Kshatriya* only were capable of achieving *moksha*, but the Hindu philosophers believed that "liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect". Their views were based on the sayings of Vyasa and Vasudeva and on the fact that Vasudeva descended from a Sudra family.<sup>18</sup> Finally, al-Biruni's observations and reactions as a Muslim to the then prevailing caste system in India led him to a conclusion of significance. Such systems, he says, abound in India and in their character they are diametrically opposed to the belief of the Muslims who considered "all men as equal, except in piety". This, he says, was "the greatest obstacle which prevents any approach or understanding between Hindus and Muslims."<sup>19</sup>

The above two examples of Arabic writings on India's caste system, one belonging to the ninth and the other to the eleventh century, represent the types of views entertained by the Arab literati on the subject. The first group dividing the castes into seven, obviously presented a distorted picture: while they included the four castes and two of the outcastes, the *Domba* and the *Candala*, in their list, the first and the highest according to their reckoning, *al-Shakthariya*, have not yet been finally identified. But in all probability the name used is the Arabicised form of the royal title *chakravarti*.\* This report suggests that when it was drawn up the traditional concept of *chaturvarnya* was not strictly followed in India. In the report the *chakravarti* is given the highest place, the kings always belonging to them, whereas the only quality of the *Kshatriya* is that they drank moderately.

\* As suggested by H. W. Bailey to Professor V. Minorsky, see Marvazi, p. 124. Other identifications are: *Satkasatriya* as suggested by Nainar; *Sakyaputra*, medieval Buddhist priests, by Minorsky and *al-Takuriya* (Thakurs) as suggested to the author of the present work by Muhammad Shafi (See Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, p. 146).



A rather unusual position ascribed to the Brahmana is that they prostrated themselves before the *Sumani* (Sramana). The whole account suggests unconventional ideas and practices among the various castes. While on the one hand it suggests a lower position for the Brahmanical class *vis-a-vis* the Buddhist ascetics and hence predominance of Buddhist influence, on the other hand it reflects the power and superiority of the ruling class. Mihira Bhoja the Great of the Imperial Gurjaras (c. A.D. 835-888) has been described by K. M. Munshi as "a *chakravarti* in the true Indian sense of the term,"<sup>20</sup> and it is possible that the reputation of the Gurjaras in these terms may have given the Arabs the impression of their belonging to the *chakravarti* caste. The basic reason, however, for this unconventional and apparently distorted account seems to have been the revolutionary change that the Hindu society was passing through during this period. As a result of the conquests by the Arabs and the political upheavals, the Hindu society was confronted with a new situation and the *Manusmriti* had to be re-interpreted so as to suit new conditions. Medhatithi, the celebrated commentator of Manu's laws, re-interpreted various concepts so as to meet the challenge of the time.<sup>21</sup> *Varnasramadharm* he conceived as "a dynamic human organisation, not a static social order. A Brahmana can marry the daughter of a Kshatriya or of a Vaisya", "Brahmanhood is not acquired by birth alone", etc.<sup>22</sup> Medhatithi's dynamic outlook, says Munshi, was not restricted to theory but was applied in practice as found from the testimony of the Arab chroniclers and the *Devalasmriti* whose author Devala lived between A.D. 800 and 900.<sup>23</sup> Again, the king, according to Medhatithi's interpretation, need not be a Kshatriya. "It is a mere *arthavada*, of glorification to say that the Creator produced a king out of the elements of divine beings. Kings, as such, possess no divinity."<sup>24</sup>

### 3. PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

#### (i) Racial Characteristics

Indians are generally described by the Arab writers and travellers as a handsome, attractive and tall people and their women folk, specially beautiful.<sup>25</sup> Al-Mas'udi considered the women of *Takka-desa* (Punjab) as the most beautiful of all the women

of India.<sup>26</sup> Al-Jahiz, who visited neither India nor China and must have received his information from the travellers and merchants visiting the cosmopolitan city of Baghdad, relates that the Indians possessed such qualities as the Chinese did not.<sup>27</sup>

The Arabs of this period and particularly the learned among them believed in different racial characteristics as being peculiar to human beings belonging to different regions of the earth due to the nature of the habitat, climatic conditions and the environment. Such a belief had its origin in ancient Greek theories propounded by Aristotle and taken over by Claudius Ptolemy who was the father of Arab geographical thought. The general concept was that the equatorial regions of the earth were the hottest regions of the world due to the proximity of the sun and the direct rays of the sun reaching them. But the farther north of the equator one travelled, the colder would it become till the extreme northern regions were so cold that habitation was impossible there. The same rule applied to the regions lying south of the equator.<sup>28</sup> The Arabs divided the known quarter of the earth, north of the equator, into seven climes, and hence the fourth clime, or the middle one, was considered to be the most moderate of all in climate, racial characteristics of the people, and their temperament. Iraq lay in this clime, and hence we find some writers hailing from Baghdad full of praise and glorification for Iraq and its people. Al-Mas'udi, the tenth century historian, geographer and globe-trotter, was one such writer.<sup>29</sup> So this rule applied to India and its people also, as the Arabs conceived it, and they were not, therefore, surprised in recording that there were amongst Indians people of different colours, very fair, brown and black, for it was the climate of the region that imparted such colours to its inhabitants. This view was not simply based on theory. The Arab travellers themselves did witness this variety in colour in India.

### (ii) *Personal Habits and Dress*

Sulayman says that the Indians were in the habit of keeping long beards. He must naturally be referring to the ascetics, sadhus and such like, for in all probability, it was not customary with Indian artists in those days to keep beards as it is in our own times. Sulayman goes a step further and says that he had seen people with beards as long as three cubits! From the Is-



lamic angle, one should keep a beard but no moustache. Hence, he remarks that the Indians did not clip the hair of the upper lip. But the hair of the head and the beard of a dead person were shaved off.<sup>30</sup> Again, unlike the Muslims, the Indians did not practice circumcision.<sup>31</sup> Buzurg b. Shahriyar, the sea-captain of Ramhurmuz and a great story-teller, relates an anecdote to the effect that (in ancient times) the Indians tied their hair over the head like caps and the shape of their swords was straight. But once after a battle the victorious party asked the defeated one to hang their hair down. So, they did and the shape of their swords (*qaratil*) also changed. They had to have curved ones instead of the former straight ones! This practice, he says, was still followed by them during his time.<sup>32</sup>

The women of the Laccadive and the Maldive Islands, according to Ibn Battuta, did not cover their heads, not even their queens did so; they combed their hair and gathered it on one side (in the true Mohenjo-Daro style!). Most of them wore only an apron from the waist to the ground, the rest of the body being uncovered.<sup>33</sup> According to al-Idrisi, the women of these Islands plaited their hair and embellished them with about ten combs made of the shell of the sea-turtle (*al-dhabl*). They kept their heads uncovered.<sup>34</sup>

The people of al-Mansura (Sind), according to Ibn Hauqal, al-Istakhri, al-Maqdisi and al-Idrisi, dressed in the 'Iraqi fashion, while their kings wore tunics (*qaratiq*) and grew their hair long like the Indian Kings.<sup>35</sup> The common people of Makran dressed in tunics but the merchants and the élite wore shirts (with long sleeves) and cloaks and used long pieces of cloth and kerchiefs of gold lamé for their turbans, in the style of the merchants of 'Iraq and Fars.<sup>36</sup> The people of Qandahar, according to al-Idrisi, kept unusually long beards reaching to their knees and even beyond. "It is wide and very hairy." These people had round faces and dressed in the Turkish fashion. It was proverbial to talk of their huge and long beards.<sup>37</sup> According to Ibn al-Faqih the Indians (men) had pigtaails.<sup>38</sup>

The dresses and habits of Indian kings, queens and nobles, unusual and interesting from the Arab point of view, are also described by the writers, e.g. Indian Kings, according to Abu Zayd, wore gold ear-rings, studded with precious stones, and fine necklaces of rubies and emeralds. Actually, men and women

both wore ear-rings and gold bangles on their wrists.<sup>39</sup> The Indian nobles were in the habit of being carried by porters on their shoulders and were sheltered by umbrellas made of peacock-feathers.<sup>40</sup> *Ballahra* (Vallabha-*raja*)\*, the king of Nahrwara (Patan, Gujerat), as related by al-Idrisi, wore a crown of gold on his head and dressed in robes woven in gold. He always rode on horseback.<sup>41</sup>

Among the various types of Indian dresses described by al-Biruni are: *dhoti*, which he calls 'turbans for trousers'; *langot*, which he calls 'a rag of two fingers' breadth, which they bind over their loins with two cords'; trousers lined heavily with cotton fastened at the back; *sidar* used for covering the head and the upper part of breast and neck fastened at the back by buttons; brassière (Ar. *qurtaqa*), a female dress.<sup>42</sup> The Indians in the olden days, he says, wore no clothes (meaning thereby few) because of the intense heat, and to prevent sunstroke, they did not cut the hair of the head. They divided the moustache into single plaits in order to preserve it.<sup>43</sup> Al-Biruni remarks that the men wore articles of female dress, like cosmetics, ear-rings, arm-rings, golden seal-rings on the ring-finger as well as on the toes of the feet.<sup>44</sup>

Al-Jahiz refers to the Indian habit of using *miswak*, tooth-pricks, hair-dyes, and the exclusively Indian habit of squatting on the floor.† Buzurg b. Shahriyar observes that the Indians bathe in tanks but to rinse the mouth they come out and do it outside the tank.<sup>45</sup>

### (iii) Food Habits

It was considered bad manners for several people to eat from the same plate.<sup>46</sup> If members of different castes ate in the same place, they sat in separate groups; in the case of two men who were enemies but belonged to the same caste, their seats were demarcated by a board or a piece of cloth being placed between them or by drawing a line between them. It was forbidden to eat the remains of a meal, hence each person ate in his own

\*Identified by me with Jayasinha Siddharaja of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty (A. D. 1096-1143) whose capital was Anahilvada (Nahrwara), see Idrisi, *India*, p. 139.

†*Op. cit.*, p. 6. *Miswak*, is the Arabic word for a tooth-stick; in India, twigs of *neem* and other trees are commonly used as toothbrush.



plate<sup>47</sup> and if the plate was earthen it was thrown away after the food was taken.<sup>48</sup> Obviously describing the custom of South India, Abu Zayd says that the kings and nobles ate in coconut leaves specially prepared for the purpose.<sup>49</sup> They ate rice and did not use wheat. They took a bath and cleansed their teeth before every meal.<sup>50</sup> According to Mutahhar, the Indians ate rice and maize and drank rain water collected in tanks (*talaj-talau*).<sup>51</sup> According to al-Biruni, Indians drank wine before every meal.<sup>52</sup> The food of the people of Gujerat, according to al-Idrisi, consisted of rice, chick-peas, beans, haricots, lentils, Indian peas, fish and animals that had died a natural death.<sup>53</sup>

*Food preparations:* Among the various food preparations *khichri* is mentioned by Arab writers and the best description is given by Ibn Battuta. It is prepared by mixing moong with rice and eaten with ghee.<sup>54</sup> He says that at a dinner prepared for the Qadi of Tirmidh, Khudawand Zadeh, on the way from Multan to Delhi, at which he had been present, the following dishes were served: thin *chapati* (bread); roast mutton; round bread filled with *sabuni* sweets and each piece covered with sweet bread called *al-khishti* made of flour, sugar and ghee; *samosak* (*samosa*) prepared out of minced meat cooked with almonds, walnuts, pistachio, onion and spices all put in the middle of a thin bread and fried with ghee; chicken *biryani* (rice cooked with ghee), and dishes called *al-hashmi* (?), and *al-qahiriya* (?). The meals were preceded by rose-water and followed by *al-fuqqa* (drink made with fruit) and, lastly, *pan*.<sup>55</sup> Another preparation described by Arab writers as "food of the sick people" is *bahta*.<sup>\*</sup> *Shamakh* (*sanwan*) has been referred to above.

#### (iv) Crime and Punishment

Indians are generally praised for their administration of justice and restoration of the rights of injured individuals. Al-Idrisi says that the Indians "administer justice among themselves without any recourse to a judge or an arbitrator. They do all this naturally, by force of habit and character in which they are brought up and to which they are accustomed".<sup>56</sup> According

<sup>\*</sup>Al-Khuwarizmi's *Mafatih al-'Ulum*, p. 186, quoted from Sulayman Nadvi, who identifies it with *bhat* which may be today's *khir* or *firni*, see 'Arab-o-Hind, p. 152.

to Qadi Sa'id al-Andalusi, India was the fountain-head of justice.<sup>57</sup> Qadi Rashid b. Zubayr says that the Indians loved justice and equity and this was their special characteristic.<sup>58</sup> Al-Qalqashandi presents a similar impression by saying that there was abundance of justice and equity in India.<sup>59</sup>

In respect of the administration of justice, al-Biruni observes that the judge first demanded from the plaintiff documentary evidence, failing which the contest was settled by means of witnesses; the witnesses might not be less than four but there might be more. If the plaintiff was unable to prove his claim, the defendant might swear to his innocence or he might ask the plaintiff to tender the oath. "Swear thou that thy claim is true and I will give thee what thou claimest." Then he goes on to describe many kinds of oaths, from the lowest to the highest, viz., swearing before five learned Brahmanas; drinking the *bish*, called *Brahmana*; being thrown into the rapidly flowing waters of a river; drinking water, sprinkled over the most venerated idol of the town, in the temple before the judge; being weighed in a scale; taking out a piece of gold from the boiling water in a kettle mixed with butter and sesame-oil; carrying a red-hot piece of iron in the hand, placed on a leaf with some scattered corns of rice in the husks and walking seven paces. This last was the highest kind of ordeal for an oath.<sup>60</sup>

Sulayman narrates the last two thus: if the claim was such as involved punishment by death, iron was heated to the white-hot point, and then seven leaves of a certain tree were placed in the hands of the plaintiff and the burning iron on top of them. He then walked up and down and then threw the iron down. His hand was then sealed in a leather bag under the king's seal and after three days he was asked to peel some grains of rice with husks on. If it had no effect on his hand, he was acquitted and the accuser was fined a maund of gold which entered the coffers of the Sultan's treasury. Sometimes a pot of iron or copper was heated to the point where no one dared go near it and then an iron ring was thrown in it and the man was asked to take it out. Sulayman says that he had seen a person actually taking it out and he was not hurt. In this case also the accuser was fined a maund of gold.<sup>61</sup> Referring to the ancient custom of *sitting dharna* in India, al-Idrisi says that an example of Indians' submission to truth and their abhorrence of falsehood was



that the claimant and the defendant, if they happened to meet each other anywhere, both entered a circle drawn on the ground for them. The claimant did not leave it until the debt was paid or he pardoned the accused.<sup>62</sup> But al-Idrisi left out one detail, namely, that the name of a particular deity was imprecated upon the debtor, who was supposed to place a curse on him if he left the circle without paying the debt.<sup>63</sup>

*Theft*: According to the Arab writers, theft was very severely punished in India. A thief was executed. According to Sulayman, theft, whether big or small, was punished with execution and if a man stole even a *fals* (smallest Arab coin) or more he was given the most painful bodily punishment.<sup>64</sup> According to Buzurg b. Shahriyar, the punishment for theft by a poor man was execution and if the thief was wealthy the king confiscated all his wealth or imposed on him a heavy penalty. If a person bought a stolen article with previous knowledge that it was stolen, he was also made to pay a heavy penalty. These laws applied in the case of the Hindus and if the criminal was a Muslim living in India his case was entrusted to the *Hunarman* of the Muslims in India so that he might punish the guilty according to the Islamic Law. *Hunarman* was like the *qadi* in the Islamic countries and he could be appointed only from amongst the Muslims in India.<sup>65</sup> The law of theft, says al-Biruni, directed that the punishment should be in accordance with the value of the thing stolen. If the object was very great, the Brahmins were mutilated as well as blinded, while the Kshatriyas only mutilated, but the thieves of other castes were killed.<sup>66</sup>

#### (v) *Conjugal Relations and Fornication*

Some Arab writers were apparently completely misinformed about conjugal relations and indulged in depicting a very distorted and morbid picture of the Indians in respect of fornication, etc. The Sicilian geographer al-Idrisi says, "If a person wishes to have conjugal relations with his daughter, or his sister, or his maternal aunt or paternal aunt, he does so, provided that they are not already married. Similarly, a brother does so with his sister."<sup>67</sup> The Arabs imagined that fornication was 'permissible' in India. Actually, the source of such reports was Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad b. Ishaq who had spent two years in Khmer, and from whom the majority of the Arab writers borrowed their

information. According to him the generality of the Indian Kings and people permitted fornication and considered intoxicating wine unlawful, except the King of Khmer, who prohibited both fornication and wine.\* According to Mutahhar, fornication is permissible for those who practise celibacy.<sup>68</sup> Abu Zayd who collected and edited several reports on India, refers to women belonging to the profession of harlotry. They lived in the inns along the travelling routes. Some others practised it quite openly in the markets. These latter were supposed to be rewards of the gods to their mothers as a result of the latter's prayers to them, etc.<sup>69</sup> Al-Biruni clears up the general misconception and holds the Indian kings responsible for permitting this practice. He says that people thought that harlotry was allowed in India but that it was not so. The fact was that Hindus were not severe in punishing whoredom for which the fault lay with the king and not with the nation. They allowed it for financial reasons. "By the revenues", he says, "which they derive from the business both as fines and taxes, they want to recover the expenses which their treasury has to spend on the army."<sup>70</sup> An adultress, according to him, was driven out of the house of the husband and banished. According to Sulayman, if the woman seduced the man to commit adultery both were executed, and if a man committed adultery by force the man was executed. If both committed adultery with mutual consent then both were executed.<sup>71</sup>

#### (vi) *Drinking Liquor*

All Arab writers of the medieval times are unanimous in informing us that drinking of wine or any alcoholic preparation was prohibited by law in medieval India. They say that the Indians abstained from drinking wine not because it was prohibited by their religion but because of the evil influence it exercised on the human brain. The kings were particularly reprimanded if they indulged in wine-drinking for the Indians believed that kings who were addicted to it were unfit to rule the people and deserved to be dethroned. A king must not indulge in this habit

\*Ibn Rusta's 'Account of India', *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49; cf. I. Khur., pp. 66-67; Ibn al-Faqih, p. 15; Idrisi, p. 29. Minorsky, *Marvazi*, p. 153. The King of Khmer referred to here by the reporter may be the founder of the Khmer Empire, Jayavarman II (A.D. 802-69). See Minorsky, *Marvazi*, pp. 152-53.



if he was to successfully govern his subjects.<sup>72</sup> Mutahhar b. Tahir categorically states that drinking of wine was considered illegal for the Brahmans.<sup>73</sup> Al-Biruni states the problem very precisely; he counts wine-drinking as one of the many acts like killing of animals, etc. prohibited by law, but these applied exclusively to the Brahmans for they were the guardians of the religion and abstention prevented them from giving way to their lusts. But wine, he says, was allowed to the Sudra, who could drink it but dared not sell it, just as he was not allowed to sell meat.<sup>74</sup> The Laws of Manu state, "The slayer of a Brahmana, (a twice-born man) who drinks (the spirituous liquor called) Sura, he who steals (the gold of a Brahmana), and he who violates a Guru's bed, must each and all be considered as men who committed mortal sins (mahapataka)."<sup>75</sup> Different from the general testimony of the Arabs, Buzurg b. Shahriyar relates that in the Hindu religion wine was prohibited for men, but allowed for women.<sup>76</sup> But the *Manusmriti* prescribed that libations of water shall not be offered to women who drink spirituous liquor.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Rusta relates Abu Abdillah Muhammad b. Ishaq as saying, "I have found Indian merchants, one and all, abstaining from wine-drinking. They have it neither in small quantities nor in large. From amongst the (various) drinks, vinegar is loathed most by them. Their vinegar is made of the water (extracted) from cooked rice, which is fermented until it turns as sour as the vinegar (itself). If they come across a Muslim drinking wine, they consider him to be a mean (person) and do not pay much heed to him. They think he is of low (status) and pass such remarks about him as 'this man must have no respect in his homeland'.<sup>78</sup> Indians made different types of wines and liquors in the medieval times as we learn from the Arab writers; the most common seemed to have been *toddy*.\* In Tanjore district, wine was also made from honey, cooked with cardamom seeds.†

Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari (d. A.H. 748) quotes Siraj al-Din Abu 'l-Safa 'Umar al-Shibli as saying that wine was "not to be found in Delhi at all either in public or in private for the sovereign is strict about it and does not like those who drink it. Apart from this, the Indians themselves do not like taking wine or any

\*Sulayman calls it 'coconut wine', see *Akhbar*, p. 8.

†According to al-Idrisi, a quantity of this wine sufficient for a whole company of men was available at half a dirham, see *India*, p. 29.

other intoxicating drinks, except *tanbul* which is permissible and nice."<sup>79</sup>

(vii) *Marriage*

Describing the marriage customs of the Indians, Sulayman says that they felicitated each other and exchanged wealth as gifts according to their status and position. It was also customary among them to announce a marriage by playing symbals and tambourines. The Indians were free to marry the women of their choice.<sup>80</sup> But as a whole the Arabs were unaware of the various laws and customs relating to marriages and were often confused about it. Mutahhar points out that the Indians did not marry their near relatives.<sup>81</sup> However, al-Biruni draws a more accurate picture of the marriage customs and laws of marriage and of its various forbidden degrees. A man may marry one to four wives. It is better to marry a stranger than a relative and the more distant the relationship of a woman with regard to her husband the better. "It is absolutely forbidden to marry", he says, "related women both of the direct *descending* line, viz. a grand-daughter or great-grand-daughter, and of the direct *ascending* line, viz. a mother, grandmother, or great grandmother. It is also forbidden to marry collateral relations, viz. a sister, a niece, a maternal or paternal aunt and their daughters, except in case the couple of relations who want to marry each other be removed from each other by five consecutive generations." But such marriage was an object of dislike.<sup>82</sup>

(viii) *India's Wisdom and Sagacity*

Medieval Arabic literature is full of praise and admiration for Indian wisdom and sagacity. The Indians are described as one of the most ancient races of the world. Al-Mas'udi counts them among the seven great races of the world.<sup>83</sup> Shahrastani says that some people divided the races of the world into four, namely, the Arabs, the Persians, the Greeks and the Indians and then compared the Indians with the Arabs and said they are nearer to each other in their religious practices; they take great interest in establishing the main characteristics of things, in judging their origins and truths, and in using spiritual methods.<sup>84</sup> Al-Jahiz declares Indians to be people of sound judgment and



courage. He says, "India is the fountain-head of wisdom, thought and insight."<sup>85</sup> Al-Mas'udi states, "A group of the people of insight and investigation, who have devoted their attention to and contemplated over the nature and origin of this world, have stated that in the ancient times the Indians were the people endowed with righteousness and sagacity, and when the nations began to spring, and parties began to grow, the Indians desired to give (some form) of unity to the kingdom and to overpower its seat so that they may become the rulers. Hence their leaders declared: 'We were the people of origin; the end and the ultimate object lies with us; for us is the beginning and the end. It was from amongst us that the father originated and traversed the earth. We overpower and annihilate anyone who impedes us or rebels or contrives against us, unless he, once again, becomes obedient.' Having fixed this objective for themselves, they appointed a king over themselves, namely, the great *al-Brahman*, who is the greatest of the kings and the foremost *imam* among them. During his reign wisdom blossomed and the learned men took the lead."<sup>86</sup> Al-Qalqashandi speaks of them as a people of sagacity and wisdom who controlled their ambitions,<sup>86</sup> and Qadi Sa'id al-Andalusi remarks that the Indians were the source and mine of all wisdom. In his view there were eight nations who devoted themselves to science, namely, the Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and the Arabs, but the Indians were the largest in number with great kingdoms and whose wisdom and knowledge was an established fact.<sup>87</sup>

\**Muruj* I, pp. 148-50: tr. by S. Maqbul Ahmad, quoted from *M.M.C.V.*, p. 99; cf. al-Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikh*, I, pp. 95-105. Al-Mas'udi points out in the following pages that according to some this *Brahman* was Adam and the messenger of God, while according to others he was a king (al-Mas'udi, *M.M.C.V.*, p. 99, *et seq.*). Al-Biruni describes *Pitamha* as *Brahman*, the first father. (*A.I.*, I, pp. 178, 361.) Discussing punishment and expiation, al-Biruni points out that according to the Hindu tradition, 'originally the affairs of government and war were in the hands of the Brahmins, but the country became disorganized, since they ruled according to the philosophic principles of their religious codes which proved impossible when opposed to the mischievous and perverse elements of the populace . . . . Therefore they humiliated themselves before the lord of their religion. Whereupon Brahman entrusted them exclusively with the functions which they now have, whilst he entrusted the Kshatriyas with the duties of ruling and fighting' (*A.I.*, II, pp. 161-162).

(ix) *Science and Art*

India's ancient and medieval sciences and arts were more or less known to the medieval Arab educated class either through Arabic translations of Indian works or through their descriptions in Arabic books on the history of sciences. The subject has been discussed in the chapter on cultural relations and exchange. Suffice it here to say that most of the Arab writers of this period spoke highly of India's contribution to various sciences and fine arts and were impressed by their originality of thought and knowledge.<sup>88</sup> Al-Biruni compared the (ancient) Indians to the Greeks (*al-Rum*) in their contributions to geography. However, he considered the Greeks superior to the Indians in this respect.<sup>89</sup>

*Magic, Telepathy, etc.*: Besides the exact sciences, the Arabs speak of Indians indulging in some of the pseudo-sciences as well. Al-Marvazi says that the Indians practised magic, telepathy (lit: 'imagination'), sorcery (*nirang*) and talismans (*simabandat*) with whose help they claimed to stop rains and hail-storms, and performed other wonders.<sup>90</sup> According to Abu Zayd, they drew auguries from crows and other birds, and magic, sorcery and 'imagination' were practised at Kanauj.<sup>91</sup> Indians also used charms and amulets to cure the effects of poisons and pains.<sup>92</sup>

*Fine Arts*: There are odd references scattered in different Arabic literary and other works of the period throwing some light on the Arabs' acquaintance with India's fine arts in the Middle Ages. But the information is so meagre that one can hardly form a complete picture about the subject. Al-Jahiz praises Indians for their proficiency in sculpture and frescoes.<sup>93</sup> Al-Mas'udi refers to a temple of *aladri* which was famous in India; it had a village with numerous cells around it for the devotees of this temple. M. Barbier de Meynard suggests the Ellora caves as an identification of this temple.<sup>94</sup>

Al-Idrisi relates on the authority of some authentic books of information that most of the kings of India practised the art of drawing. They believed in it and studied it with greater zeal than the students of this art themselves. An Indian king, he says, nominated as his successor the one among his sons who was most proficient in this art. 'No other art is given preference over the art of drawing or making pictures. The art of pottery is placed on a par with it in being superior (to other arts).'



Thus, they call the potter 'the small creator' and the picture-maker (painter) 'the great creator' . . .<sup>95</sup> Buzurg b. Shahriyar says that it was customary among the Indians to draw prominent people of all walks of life. So, one of the kings of India is said by him to have drawn a picture of a certain Muhammad b. Babshad because the latter held a prominent position among the captains of the sea.<sup>96</sup>

References are also found in Arabic literature to Indian music. Among the Indian instruments known to the Arabs, a certain instrument called *al-kankala* is often mentioned by them. It is described as having only one string which passes over a leathern bag. This served the purpose of the measures of the lute and the cymbal.<sup>97</sup> Among the Arab philosophers who studied Indian music was the celebrated al-Kindi (d. c. 873). Al-Ahwani, in his monograph on al-Kindi in which he discusses al-Kindi's researches and contribution to music, quotes al-Kindi's view that the Persians did not derive any pleasure from the organ (*al-arghin*) and the gong (*naqus*), while the Indians and the Romans did not enjoy the Khurasani *tunbur* (lute, mandoline). The difference in the effects produced on people was due to the nature of the situation which affects the forms of the instruments also in the same way as the forms, characters and habits of those nations are different from each other. So, in India they used an instrument with a single string called *kanka*.<sup>98</sup> This instrument may be identified with 'the bow-harp', described as the true *vina* of the Vedic literature.<sup>99</sup> Al-Mas'udi describes India as having a variety of delightful musical instruments which created in the listeners the emotions of weeping and smiling.<sup>1</sup> Similar references are found with regard to dancing. In both the arts the Indians are said to have had a higher standard than any other people.<sup>2</sup>

*Military Science:* Indians had also developed the art of war to perfection. They had different formations of troops, various weapons and swords, different types of drums, fifes, trumpets, tuned to the voices of the elephants, lions and tigers, and other terrifying instruments.<sup>3</sup> According to Jahiz the Indians possessed excellent swords and were past-masters at fencing.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Mas'udi, who visited al-Mansura the Arab capital of Sind in about A.D. 916, states that the then ruler of Mansura Abu'l-Mundhir 'Umar b. 'Abd Allah had eighty war elephants.

Each elephant was placed in the middle of five hundred infantry men. Thus, he was able to fight enemy cavalries of thousands. Two of his elephants had become well-known in India for their courage and charging potentialities. One of them was called *Manfaraqlas* and the other *Haydara*. The former was a very interesting animal with excellent qualities. When his *mahout* died he stopped eating and drinking and cried like a human being with tears in his eyes. He was the leader of the remaining of the eighty elephants.<sup>5</sup> Describing the use of the elephants in battles, al-Idrisi says that each elephant was fitted with a coat of mail and twelve persons could sit on a single big elephant and fight with leather-shields, swords and iron-clubs. The elephant driver sat on the head of the elephant with a goad in his hand to pull its trunk and a rod to turn it with. In the battle-field the elephants were made to charge one against the other; so that the stronger trampled over the weaker; their movements included attacks and retreats.<sup>6</sup> Details of the formations of the armies of Sultan Muhammad b. Tughluq in the battle field are given by al-'Umari.<sup>7</sup> According to al-Qalqashandi who quotes al-'Umari, this Sultan had a cavalry of 9,00,000 horsemen in all, who were all provided by the Sultan's *divan*. The officers of his army had the ranks of *Khans*, *Maliks*, *Amirs*, *Sipahsalar*s and lastly, the ordinary ranks.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. POLITICAL STRUCTURE

##### A. THE ANCIENT PERIOD

In the medieval Arabic historical and geographical literature and in the accounts of Arab travellers dealing with India we come across very rich and valuable material on the social and political history of ancient and medieval India. References are found to some ancient kings of India probably belonging to the period of the Mauriyas and the Guptas and to the various ruling dynasties of the later period, like the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj, the Palas of Bengal, the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan and the kings of Kamarupa, Kashmir, etc. As for the accounts of the Arab conquests of Sind and the lower Punjab and the Arab and the Hindu rulers of these regions, Arabic sources possess some original and trustworthy information on the subject. Again,



some interesting material is also available on the expeditions of Mahmud of Ghazna in India, on the dynastic histories of the Ghoris, the Slaves and the Tughluqs, besides some information on other princes, like the rajas of Banaras, etc. When, however, we come to the Mughal period, the information is scanty and given secondary importance, *e.g.* in relation to the history of the Muslim rulers of Gujarat. There seems to be no systematic account in Arabic dealing with the Mughals, perhaps because the Arab historians were not interested in the affairs of the Mughals in India. Secondly, by the 16th century, Arabic historiography itself had, after many centuries of development and growth, started showing signs of decay and was becoming localized and regional in its scope.

The sources of the Arab historians and geographers on ancient and medieval periods were varied. Few of them actually visited India but a large majority of them utilized the various reports prepared by the early travellers, scholars, or envoys of the caliphs sent to India on particular missions. These reports were original and authentic. Then there were reports prepared by Indians visiting the Arab countries in an official capacity for the purpose of securing from the caliphs religious sanctions in the form of *sanads* and *manshurs* for the Muslim rulers in India. It is very unlikely that any Sanskrit works dealing with Indian history, even though these were few in number, were utilized by the Arab chroniclers for their knowledge of India's political history. Although a large number of original Sanskrit treatises on a variety of subjects other than political history were rendered into Arabic during the 'Abbasid period (A.D. 750-1258), there is no evidence to show that the extant Arabic reports on the ancient and medieval kings of India were drawn from Sanskrit sources or from their Arabic translations. Likewise, the Persian histories of India written in the Middle Ages do not seem to have formed the source of the Arab chroniclers' knowledge of Indian political history.

An Indian historian desirous of utilizing the Arabic sources for Indian history faces several problems; in the first place, apart from one or two exceptions, he would not find single works or monographs dealing with any particular dynasty or period. The varied accounts and diverse information is interspersed among other subjects and topics, besides falling under specific

headings as *al-Hind*, etc. Then there is the question of identification of proper names and place-names which in their Arabic form are usually difficult to recognize, and often mutilated. Thus establishing the orthography of the word is the first step, followed by identification, fixing the date, place and other related problems. Lastly, in spite of the laudable efforts of the orientalists, like Gabriel Ferrand, V. Minorsky and others, a large part of this literature still remains unpublished.

The accounts that deal with the ancient kings of India (al-Mas'udi, Ya'qubi) have been analysed by me to a certain extent but much remains to be done by way of identification of names of the ancient Indian monarchs. As for the names of the rulers belonging to the post-Gupta period, most of them have been satisfactorily identified by Indian and European orientalists. The Sultanate and the later periods present little difficulty by way of identification. Identification of names is not the only problem that deserves the attention of scholars. A vast amount of historical information incorporated by the Arab historians in their works remains to be verified and corroborated with other contemporary evidence, written or otherwise. It is the task of the historians of India to analyse and verify veracity or otherwise of this mine of information on India preserved in Arabic literature. This task acquires greater significance when we realize that there is dearth of data and evidence specially pertaining to the ancient period of India's history. The more the Arabic sources are worked out, the larger the scope of our information shall be.

#### (i) *Some Ancient Kings of India*

In the works of writers like al-Mas'udi and al-Ya'qubi,<sup>9</sup> we find accounts pertaining to certain ancient kings of India, which seem to be admixtures of history and legend.

According to al-Mas'udi the first ever elected<sup>10</sup> king of India was the great al-Brahman. "During his reign wisdom blossomed and the learned men took the lead. They extracted iron from the mines, and swords, daggers and a variety of the implements of war were manufactured. He constructed lofty monuments and embellished them with illuminating precious stones, wherein the Spheres, the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac and the Planets were



depicted. He demonstrated pictorially the nature of the Universe and explained with the help of pictures the nature of the influence of the Planets upon this world and the way they cause the appearance of animal bodies belonging to the intelligent and other categories. He also explained the state of the supreme ruler, namely, the Sun. He recorded the evidence of all these (questions) in a book. Thus, those (questions) became perceptible to the intelligence of the common people and the knowledge of the superior being became implanted in the souls of the *élite*. He gave an indication of the Prime Being who gives the whole universe its existence and is profusely generous to it. So, the Indians followed him and the country became prosperous; he guided them to the path of worldly welfare."<sup>11</sup> His rule, says al-Mas'udi, "lasted for 366 years until his death. His descendants are called *al-Brahima* (after him) until our own times. The Indians venerate them and they are the highest and the most noble of their castes. They refrain from eating animals and both men and women among them wear yellow threads round their necks, hanging them like scabbards of swords as a mark of distinction from the other castes of India."<sup>12</sup> There is little doubt that this al-Brahman of Mas'udi and of other Arab writers was no king but *Pitamaha*, i.e. the first father or *Brahman*.<sup>13</sup> Al-Mas'udi not only makes al-Brahman the ancestor of the subsequent kings described in the list but ascribes to his reign the growth of astronomy, philosophy and other literary activities. Thus, according to him *Surya-siddhanta* (*al-Sindhind*) was produced during his time and on this work were based *Aryabhatiya* (*al-Arjabhad*), *Khandakhadyaka* (*al-Arkand*) and even Ptolemy's *Almajest*.\* Again, during his reign, 'the nine numerals encompassing the Indian numeral system' were invented and he was the first to de-

\* *Al-Sindhind* was the Arabic title of *Surya-Siddhanta*, the *Siddhanta* of the sun, composed by Lata. It was known by the Hindus as *Siddhanta*, i.e. *straight*. There were five *Siddhantas*, whose authors, according to al-Biruni, drew from one and the same source, the book *Paithamaha*, so called from the first father, i.e. Brahman. (*Al-Beruni's India*, I, p. 153). *Al-Arjabhad* was *Aryabhatiya* by Aryabhata of Kusumapura (born A.D. 476). *Al-Arkand* is *Khandakhadyaka* by Brahmagupta son of Jisnu of Bhillamala; he wrote in A.D. 665. *Almajest* is *Majeste* by Claudius Ptolemy. For further discussion, see *M.M.C.V.*, p. 100, note 5, and my article "Al-Mas'udi's Contributions to Medieval Arab Geography", *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, pp. 66, note 39.

fine the apogee of the Sun and its passage in the Sphere; then he had all the calculations and facts pertaining to the Prime Being and the most ancient history of the Indians recorded in *the House of Gold (Bayt al-Dhahab)*.<sup>\*</sup> This mixing of the concept of Brahman with a king was probably present in the source which al-Mas'udi utilized for his information, for he says that there was difference of opinion as to who *al-Brahman* was. Some people claimed that he was Adam and a messenger of God sent to India, whereas others asserted that he was a king; the latter was the more popular belief in India in his time.<sup>14</sup> Max Müller in his Introduction to the *Upanishads* remarks that it was well-known fact that the Hindus, even as early as the Brahmana period, were fond of tracing their various branches of knowledge back to Brahman or Brahman Svayambhu and then through Prajapati, and sometimes through the Devas, to the various ancestors of their ancient families.<sup>15</sup> According to al-Biruni, the authors of the five *Siddhantas* drew from one and the same ancient source, the Book *Paithamaha*, so called from *the first father, i.e. Brahman*.<sup>16</sup> The source of al-Mas'udi must have been based on some such tradition which he utilized.

Again, the concepts of *Kalpa* and *chaturyuga* are discussed by al-Mas'udi in his *Muruj* in relation to Brahman, but in *al-Tanbih wa 'l-Ishraf*, quite independently, as astronomical and philosophical concepts of the Indians. In the later work he describes the concept which the Arab writers called 'the days of the world' or 'the days of *al-Sindhind*' and says that according to the theories of the Indian astronomers god created the planets in the 0° of Aries† and then caused them all to move; so they began to move and in a wink of the eye followed a known path. This first movement was the first day of the world; they will continue to follow this path throughout 'the days of *al-Sindhind*' until they will all reassemble at the place where they were created, in their original form and this stage, according to the Indians, will be the end of the world. The total 'days of *al-Sindhind*' since the beginning of the revolution of the planets is

<sup>\*</sup>This is also the name used by Arabs for Multan.

†A *Kalpa*, according to al-Biruni, is a period at the beginning and end of which there is a conjunction of the seven planets and their apices and nodes in 0° of Aries. The days of the *Kalpa* are called *Kalpa-ahargana*. See *op. cit.* I, p. 368.



4,320,000,000 solar years, with a year equal to  $365\frac{1}{4}$  days and  $81/400$  minutes.\* Al-Biruni points out that the Muslim authors called the days of the *Kalpa* the *days of the Sind-hind* or the *days of the world*. The figure of the total number of years of the *Kalpa* of *Brahman* as given by al-Mas'udi is corroborated by al-Biruni. Describing the theory as presented by Brahmagupta, al-Biruni says that according to the latter, "Since the planets and mankind in the world came into existence at the beginning of the day of *Brahman*, and since they both perish at the end of it, we must adopt this day of their existence as a *Kalpa*, not another period." However, the view of Brahmagupta that day of *Brahman* is equal to 2,000 *chaturyuga* because a thousand *chaturyuga* are one day of *Devaka*, i.e. *Brahman*, and a night of his is of the same length,<sup>17</sup> is not referred to by al-Mas'udi.

According to al-Ya'qubi, after *al-Brahman* India was divided politically and consequently subjugated by the foreigners. The Indians then elected a certain *Zarih* and made him their king. During his reign the country prospered once again and became powerful. *Zarih's* empire expanded and he is said to have invaded Babylon and the land of Israel twenty years after the death of king Solomon, son of David and during the reign of the former's son *Rahba'am*. As a result of the prayers of the Israelites to God, death and destruction were wrought upon *Zarih* and his army. So, after an unsuccessful adventure, he returned to India.<sup>18</sup> In al-Mas'udi's works this Indian monarch is spelt as *Zanbil* and is mentioned as having launched a military expedition against Syria during the reign of *Ahrimun*, the king of Syria; but after a year's war with the Syrians and the occupation of their country he was finally defeated by one of the Arab rulers, whose name is not given by al-Mas'udi.<sup>19</sup>

Al-Brahman, according to al-Mas'udi, was followed by his eldest son *al-Bahbud* who is said to have ruled for a 100 years. He encouraged the study of philosophy and gave the philosophers the foremost place in the country.<sup>20</sup>

\**Al-Tanbih* (ed. de Goeje, pp. 220-221). But al-Mas'udi's calculations in *Muruj*, I, p. 152, are apparently wrong, for he confuses a *Kalpa* with *chaturyuga* and gives the period of 'the age of the world' as 432,000,000 solar years, and calls it a *hazarwan*. What al-Mas'udi calls a *hazarwan* (actually *hazarwan*, 'one thousandth') is a *chaturyuga* (Al-Biruni, *A.I.*, I, p. 368; 1 *Kalpa*=1,000 *chaturyuga*). Cf. al-Ya'qubi who gives the age of the world as 4,320,000,000 (I, p. 96).

He was followed by *Zaman* who ruled for 150 years and fought many battles with the Persians and the Chinese.<sup>21</sup> *Zaman* may tentatively be identified with Rama-Gupta,<sup>22</sup> or with Chandra-Gupta II, who had defeated the Sakas.<sup>23</sup>

*Zaman* was succeeded, according to these Arab writers, by *Fur* (Porus) who was attacked by Alexander the Great and killed in a battle against him; according to al-Mas'udi, *Fur* fought the battle against Alexander on the banks of the Ganges and was killed. The Arab writers describe the military strategy employed by Alexander of creating a chaos in the ranks of the enemy by baffling the elephants of Porus. In fact Porus was defeated by Alexander on the banks of Hydaspes (Jhelum) in 326 B.C. and was not killed.<sup>24</sup> *Fur* is said to have ruled India for 140 years.

He was followed by *Dbshlam* whose reign lasted for 110 years. He is said to have been the author of *Kalila wa Dimna*<sup>25</sup> the stories based on *Panchatantra*. The Arabic title of the book represents the names of the two jackals, *Karataka* and *Damanaka*, who figure in the first book of the *Panchatantra*. *Dbshlam* may not represent any king of India but perhaps the name *Visnucaraman*, the relator of these stories.<sup>26</sup>

He was succeeded by *Balhit* who is said to be the author of a book on chess entitled *Taraq-Janka*. The game of chess was at its zenith during his reign. His rule, according to the Arab writers, lasted for 80 or 130 years. *Balhit* may correspond to *Baladitya* which was the title of *Narasimha-Gupta*.\*

He was followed by *Korash* who according to al-Mas'udi "introduced new religious seeds among the Indian people, and himself abandoned the religion of his predecessors. *Sindbad*, the author of 'The Book of Seven Ministers, the Master, the Youth and the Lady', entitled *Kitab al-Sindhind*,† lived during the reign

\*Budh-Gupta's brother *Narasimha-Gupta*, his son and grandson ruled between A.D. 500 and 570. *Narasimha-Gupta*, after becoming the king, assumed the title of *Baladitya*. Hiuen Tsang refers to *Baladitya* as king of *Maghadha* (*M.M.C.V.*, pp. 103-104, & note 3). From al-Ya'qubi's account of *Balhit* it appears that Brahmanism was on the decline in his period, but he respected Brahmins, and it was a Brahman who invented chess. See al-Ya'qubi, I. pp. 100-101.

†This work corresponds to the Persian *Sindbadnameh*, the Arabic 'Seven Viziers', etc. The Plan of the work was taken from *Panchatantra*. The story is added as a note in *The Thousand and One Nights* under the title: 'Abstract of the Story of the King and his Son and the Damsel and



of this monarch. The great book on 'diagnoses of diseases and their treatment' was also composed during his time.\* He is said to have ruled for 120 years until his death. After him there was a general political decline and Indians became divided and different communities and groups appeared. Thus, separate kingdoms like those of Sind, Qanauj, Qashmir and Mankir (Malkhed, the capital of the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan) took shape.†

In al-Ya'qubi's list this king is mentioned as *Karsh*<sup>27</sup> and as the author of the book *Craftiness of the Women* (*Kitab makr al-nisa*).

In the works of al-Mas'udi and al-Ya'qubi certain names are common; in al-Ya'qubi there are a few additional names of kings belonging to the ancient period. But it seems that both drew their information from some common source. Among the additional kings mentioned by al-Ya'qubi, there is a certain *Kayhan* who, according to this author, was very wise, intelligent and a man of letters; so Alexander had entrusted to him the affairs of 'the whole of India' after Porus. He was the first to believe in *tawahhum* (imagination, telepathy). He ate poison (*bish*) and then imagined that he had a block of ice on his heart, so the poison did not cause him any harm.\*\*

Another king mentioned by al-Ya'qubi as *Hashran*, was keen to revive the religion of his ancestors. But a cunning man named *Qaftan* misguided him by propagating his own mischievous philosophy to him. Man, the latter said, formed part of the

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the Seven Wezeers'. See *M.M.C.V.*, p. 104, note (2); cf. Keith, *op. cit.* p. 360.

\*The description of the work of Sucruta as given by Ibn Abi Usaybi'a (*Uyun*, p. 32) seems to agree with the contents of this work described by al-Mas'udi. For further discussion, see *M.M.C.V.*, p. 104, note (3).

† *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 104-105. *Korash* may be identified with Harshavardhana (d.c. A.D. 647) who favoured Buddhism and showed interest in holding polemical discussions on different religions. For further discussion, see *M.M.C.V.*, p. 104, note 1.

\*\*Al-Ya'qubi, I, p. 97. Could this 'king' be Coenus, son of Polemon, one of the generals of Alexander the Great who pleaded on behalf of the soldiers of Alexander for a return home after they had refused to advance beyond the River Hyphasis in India? The effect of his speech was so great that Alexander had finally to yield to the wishes of his army and order a return. (See R. C. Majumdar, *The Classical Accounts of India*, pp. 51-58).

animal (kingdom), and animal was a part of growing organism, which in turn was part of the four temperaments: fire, air, earth and water; a growing organism was divided into three kinds; plants which have only growth; mother of pearls and similar (bodies) of the sea, which grow and have senses; and lastly, animals of the land which have growth, senses and movement. So the animal was too low and insignificant an object to be governed by the Creator. Hence, he is governed by the Universal sphere (*al-falak*). This cunning man then demonstrated to the King the truth of what he said. So the king accepted his philosophy and made it popular in his kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

*Balhit's* daughter, whose name could not be deciphered, is mentioned by al-Ya'qubi as a queen. One of her four sons had fought a rebel and was killed but the people had withheld the news of his death from her. It was this *Qaftan* who conveyed, through a game of chess, the news to her. As a reward he asked for as much wheat as the number of squares on a chess-board by giving one grain for the first square, two for the second, four for the third and so on progressively. But all the grain of the granary as well as the wheat bought with all the treasures of the queen did not suffice to fulfil the demand. The total number of grains of wheat demanded was 12,446,644,077,709,551,615 as recorded by al-Ya'qubi.<sup>29</sup>

The second group of the Indian kings described by several Arab writers belong to the period following Harsha. Although some of the writers did visit India and related their experiences in their accounts, the majority of them based their accounts on the reports of some of the early Arab travellers to India. The Arabs' source of information on these Indian Kings is not the same as that of the accounts on religions which, as already said above, was drawn up by the envoy of Yahya b. Khalid, the vizier of Harun al-Rashid. It is not certain as to who was the earliest reporter on the Indian political set-up of this period. But the earliest known report goes by the name of Sulayman, and Ibn Rusta has referred to another name, Muhammad b. 'Abdullah on the kings of South-East Asia.<sup>30</sup>

(ii) *The Rashtrakutas of the Deccan (Ballahra)*

For the Arabs the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan (c. A.D. 753-975) were the most important of the rulers of India. They are



usually referred to by the Arab writers as *Ballahra*, which, according to them, was the hereditary title adopted by these princes. In fact, the name was interpreted by the Arabs to mean 'the king of kings' or 'the king of the kings of India'. Since all the writers refer to them by this name (*Ballahra*), we have distinguished and identified the different kings to whom this term was applied by different Arab writers. Their capital was at Malkhed (Mankir) and is described as being surrounded by mountains.\* Now, Ibn Khurradadhbih's *Ballahra* almost certainly pertains to Govinda III (A.D. 793-814); Sulayman's to the same prince or to his son Sarva or Amoghavarsha (A.D. 814-878); al-Mas'udi's to Indra III (A.D. 914-922); and that of Ibn Hauqal also to Amoghavarsha.<sup>31</sup> The latter writers mostly repeat what the earlier authorities recorded, except al-Idrisi whose two separate references to *Ballahra* pertain to two different dynasties altogether: one refers to Govinda III of the Rashtrakuta dynasty of the Deccan and is based on Ibn Khurradadhbih; the other *Ballahra* seems to be king Jayasinha Siddharaja of Patan (Gujerat) belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, who ruled from A.D. 1096-1143.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned above, quite a few of the Arab writers had personally visited the Rashtrakuta kingdom in different periods. Hence we find some interesting details about these rulers and about the condition of their subjects. But the accounts generally pertain to coastal regions of the kingdom. Some Arab writers like Sulayman (9th century) give an exaggerated account of the political boundaries of the kingdom. Sulayman says that it begins from Konkan (*Kumkam*) on the west coast of India and spreads across the sub-continent towards the east up to China.<sup>33</sup> The ruler and his subjects both loved the Arabs more than any other prince of India of that period did, and Arab merchants and travellers were welcomed in their kingdom. Islam was protected and openly practised. It seems that a kind of legend had grown among the Arabs about these princes. Sulayman says that the rulers of this kingdom lived long, some times even ruling for fifty years. The subjects of *Ballahra* attributed this to their love of the Arabs. There were no kings or people who loved the Arabs more intensely than they did.<sup>34</sup> Al-Mas'udi, who visited the kingdom in A.D. 914 but did not visit the capital, also exalts the king thus:

\*Malkhed (or Malyakheta) is to the south of Gulbarga (Mysore).  
See *M.M.C.V.*, p. 105.

"There is not a king in al-Sind or al-Hind who protects the Muslims in his Kingdom as does al-Balharay. Islam is loved and protected in his Kingdom; there are ordinary and Friday mosques for them (Muslims) where they assemble for the five prayers. Each of these princes ruled for forty, fifty or even for a greater number of years and the subjects of his kingdom claim that the reigns of their rulers last for such long periods due to their practice of the tradition of justice and their veneration of the Muslims."<sup>35</sup> As for his military strength, he is described as having possessed "an unlimited number of war elephants" and seemed to have maintained a standing army for he is said to have met its expenditure from the Treasury.<sup>36</sup> The Arabs were not unaware of the political relations that existed between the various ruling dynasties of the north and the south, and of their internecine wars for political supremacy. There are no detailed accounts of these pertaining to the ancient period, but there are certain indications, direct as well as indirect, which point to a state of continuous warfare between the various princes. The sympathies of the Arab reporters were unmistakably on the side of the Rashtrakutas whose most formidable enemies, the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj, were also the enemies of the Arabs. The kingdom of the Gurjara-Pratiharas lay, according to the Arab reporters, to the north of that of the Rashtrakutas, and the latter fought against them. The Rashtrakutas are described as the paramount rulers of India.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Mas'udi, who visited Cambay in A.D. 915, records that the governor of Cambay at the time of his visit was a 'Brahman by the name of *Baniya*' who ruled on behalf of the Rashtrakuta ruler. He was keenly interested in having religious discussions with the Muslims and with people of other denominations visiting his territory.\* Visiting Chaul (near Bombay) in A.D. 916, al-Mas'udi found that the ruler of the place was a person called Janj (Ganga). He may have been a local ruler appointed by the Rashtrakutas or may have belonged to the family of the Silaharas,<sup>38</sup> the feudatories of the Rashtrakutas in the southern Konkan region. According to al-Mas'udi there were in this town ten thousand Muslims called *bayasira* who were a mixed Arab-Indian

\*The governor has been tentatively identified by me with Prachanda, of the Brahmaloka house mentioned in the Kapadvanj grant of Krishna II, dated A.D. 910. He was the Military governor of Khetaka-Mandala, according to this grant. See *M.M.C.V.*, p. 107 and note (1).



race, besides a number of Arabs from the Persian Gulf ports like Siraf, 'Uman and Basra and from Baghdad and other towns who had become naturalized Indians. Among the prominent Arab merchants was a certain Musa b. Ishaq al-Sandaluni, and the head (*al-hazmat*) of the Muslim community at the time was Abu Sa'id Ma'ruf b. Zakariya. The *hazmat* or head of the Muslim community was appointed by the king. The regional language of the people of Chaul, Sopara and Thana, according to al-Mas'udi, was called Lariya (of *Lar* or *Lata*) which may have been some form of early Prakrit, or its distinct style called Lati, which was a favourite of the poets of that region. Al-Mas'udi also refers to *Kiriya* (*Kannada*) as the language of the people of Malkhed, the capital of the Rashtrakutas.<sup>39</sup>

(iii) *The Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty (al-Jurz-Qinnauj)*

Arab writers use the name of *al-Jurz* (*al-Jurzara*=Gurjara)<sup>40</sup> for the Gurjaras of Srimala as well as for the Pratiharas, both of Ujjayn and Bhillamala, and *al-Qinnauj* for the Pratiharas of Kanauj. Referring to the Arab wars against the Gurjaras, the historian al-Ya'qubi says that Junayd, the governor of Sind, appointed by the Umayyad Caliph Hisham (A.D. 724-743) had reached 'the country of al-Jurz', and had then conquered *al-Kiraj* whose king al-Rah (Ray) fled from the battle after suffering defeat. Junayd then directed his governors against al-Marmadh, al-Mandal, Dahnaj, al-Barus, Surast, al-Baylaman, al-Malba, etc. and, by the time al-Hakam b. 'Awana became the governor of Sind, the whole of India except *al-Qassa* was subjugated.\* According to other Arab historians Junayd attacked Bahiraman and burnt its suburbs, "conquered Bailaman and Jurz", and "made incursions against Uzain."<sup>41</sup> Even though the forces of Junayd "defeated the rulers of Kachchha, Saurashtra, Chavotaka, and the Saindhava, Maurya and Gurjara kings,"<sup>42</sup> their advance in the Deccan was repulsed by the Gujarat Chalukya Pulakesi who defeated them in a battle fought between A.D. 731 and 738.<sup>43</sup> "The progress of

\*Al-Ya'qubi, II, pp. 379-80; cf. al-Baladhuri, *Futuh*, p. 621; R. C. Majumdar and others, *op. cit.*, p. 182, have suggested the identification of *al-Marmadh*, *al-Mandal*, *al-Baylaman* and *al-Malba* with Marwar, Mandor (near Viramgam?), Vallamandala and Malwa respectively. *Al-Barus* is Broach and *Surast*, Saurashtra (Kathiawar). *Dahnaj* is not identified. *Al-Qassa* seems to represent Kachchha.

the Arabs was stopped by Chalukyas in the south, the Pratiharas in the east, and the Karkotas in the north."<sup>44</sup> The ruler of Bhillamala (Bailaman), at the time of the Arab invasion, was probably Chanduka, the son of Yasovardhana of the Pratihara dynasty of Bhillamala, and the 'Jurz' of this report must be the Gurjaras of Srimala.\*

Although there were Arab incursions against the city of Ujjain, it was never actually conquered by the Arabs. It is likely that the ruler of Ujjain at this time was Nagabhata, the founder of the Pratihara family, whose greatest achievement was the defeat of "the powerful forces of *mlechchha* king".<sup>45</sup> "According to Indian inscriptions, the territories overrun by the invaders included Sind, Cutch, Surashtra or Kathiawar, Chavotaka (some Chapa principality of Gujarat or Western Rajputana), a Maurya principality apparently in southern Rajputana or Malwa, and the Gurjara territory apparently round Bhinmal or Broach."<sup>46</sup>

As for the *al-jurz* (Gurjara) of Ibn Khurradadhbih, Sulayman, al-Mas'udi and the later writers, they should be identified with the different kings belonging to the Imperial Pratiharas and more specifically to Nagabhata II, who exercised his sway over the greater part, if not the whole, of Rajputana and Kathiawar. His rule extended in the east up to Gwalior and probably even further east and included Kanauj and Kalanjara. He must have died in A.D. 833.<sup>47</sup> This is about the time when the first reports on Indian kings, later used by many writers, were prepared by the Arab travellers.

According to Sulayman (A.D. 851) *al-Jurz* ruled over 'a tongue of the earth' (Kathiawar peninsula). He had a large army and none of the kings of India had a cavalry like his. He was an enemy of the Arabs, but he acknowledged the fact that 'the king of the Arabs' ('Abbasid Caliph) was the greatest of all the kings. But he (*al-Jurz*) was the greatest enemy of Islam. In his kingdom gold ingots were used for commercial transactions.† Al-Mas'udi

\*K. M. Munshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78. Bhillamala, according to some Arab geographers (al-Biruni: the Fort of Bhilmal; Ibn Hauqal: *Qamuhul*; al-Idrisi: Mamuhul) was on the frontier between India and the Arab kingdom of Sind; according to others, part of the Arab Kingdom; and yet others describe it within *Hind* (India). See al-Idrisi, *India*, pp. 91-92.

†Sulayman, *Akhbar*, pp. 12-13; R. C. Majumdar and others, (*A.A.H.I.*, p. 170) suggest the identification of Sulayman's *al-Jurz* with Bhoja I, grandson of Nagabhata II, who was firmly enthroned at Kanauj in A.D. 836.



seemed to have exchanged some information with Abu Zayd Muhammad b. al-Hasan of Siraf whom he seems to have met twice: once in Basra in 303/915 before leaving for India and a second time on his return to 'Iraq.<sup>48</sup> It is likely that he took some of Sulayman's report from Abu Zayd. Al-Mas'udi says that *al-Jurz* (Gurjara) fought against *al-Balharay* (the Rashtrakuta) on one of the frontiers of his kingdom. He is described by this historian as a powerful monarch who exercised his authority over the rest of the kings but he was loathful of the Muslims.<sup>49</sup>

Al-Mas'udi also speaks of a king of Kanauj called *Ba'ura*. He says that after the death of Korash one of the kings of India established his rule in Kanauj. He had no access to the sea and his kingdom was adjacent to that of the Rashtrakuta. *Ba'ura* was the ruler of the city of Kanauj and one of the kings of Sind. *Ba'ura*, he says, was the title of every king who ruled over Kanauj and there was a town called *Ba'ura*\* named after this title, which in his time formed part of the territory of Islam, as a district of Multan. The territory of the king was 115,200 square miles (Arabian)† in area with 1,800,000 villages, cities, and rural towns full of trees, rivers, mountains and open fields. Militarily, he was very powerful. His army consisted of four divisions, each with 700,000 (or according to some, 900,000) men. With the army of the north he fought against the ruler of Multan and other Muslim confederates on this frontier; with the army of the south he fought against other enemies, who encountered him in every direction. As compared to other kings he possessed few elephants but he had two thousand trained elephants for his wars.<sup>50</sup>

K. M. Munshi has suggested the identification of *Ba'ura* with Mihira Bhoja the great, of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty (d.c. A.D. 885)\*\*. Although al-Mas'udi visited India nearly thirty years after the death of Mihira Bhoja, his description must pertain to the reign of this powerful monarch of India. Al-Mas'udi's description of Mihira Bhoja's kingdom suggests that his empire must

\*V. Minorsky has identified this town with 'Biruza' mentioned in *Hudud al-'Alam* (begun in A.D. 982). It was placed by Minorsky in the Punjab, and by Ray in the neighbourhood of the Sutlej (See *H. A.*, p. 252).

†1 Arabian mile=6474 ft.

\*\*In Munshi's opinion, *Ba'ura* stands for 'Bhuja'; or else it is a mispronunciation of 'Adi-Varaha', spoken as 'Braha', the epithet by which Bhoja was known (*op. cit.*, p. 116).



have covered the territory as far as the Sutlej (Panjab) in the north, and that *Ba'ura*, which once formed a part of his kingdom, was built in his memory but later lost to the Muslims, *i.e.* the Arab rulers of Multan.

The Kingdom of Kanauj (*Qinnaui*) is also described by al-Idrisi, though not as coherently as by al-Mas'udi. The former includes in the kingdom of *Qinnaui*, the towns of *Qashmir* (Srinagar?), Samundar (Sonargaon), Atrasa (Karnal), and describes the king of *Qinnaui* as a powerful and glorious monarch with extensive kingdom and possessing the largest number of elephants of any king of India. He is described as mighty and dreaded by the adjoining princes.<sup>51</sup> Although al-Idrisi wrote in the first half of the 12th century A.D., his account of the king of Kanauj does not seem to pertain to contemporary Kanauj. Kanauj was taken by the Rashtrakuta Indira III some time between A.D. 915-918, which marked the beginning of the decline of the Gurjara-Pratihara empire.<sup>52</sup> In 1018, Kanauj was taken by Mahmud of Ghazni from its ruler Rajyapala Pratihara.<sup>53</sup> The Gurjara-Pratihara empire had dwindled by the time the reporter of al-Idrisi visited India in the beginning of the 12th century. Jayasinha Siddharaja of Patan (Gujarat) (A.D. 1096-1143) whose reign was most probably described by al-Idrisi on the basis of this report, is called by the author *Ballahra* and not *al-Jurz*. Al-Idrisi's source of information on the king of Kanauj was most probably al-Jayhani who became vizier of the Samanids in A.D. 914. Hence, al-Idrisi's king Kanauj may be identified as Mihira Bhoja (c. A.D. 840-90) or with his son Mahendrapala (c. A.D. 890-908) or even with Mahipala (c. A.D. 890-908).<sup>54</sup> The limits of the kingdom of Kanauj as described by this Sicilian-Arab geographer seem to be fairly correct except for Kashmir, which did not form a part of the Kingdom. Again, if my identification of Samundar with Sonargaon (Assam) be accepted as correct, then the kingdom's north-eastern boundaries would surpass the limits of north Bengal.\*

Ibn Rusta presents a different picture of the Gurjara kingdom. According to him honesty and justice prevailed in this kingdom. It was frequently visited by Arab traders who were treated by the King in a charitable way. Business was transacted with pieces of gold and the *dirhams* called *al-Tatari*, which had the effigy of the

\*On the extent of the Pratihara empire, see *A.A.H.I.*, pp. 170-171.



king (embossed) on them.\* After completing their business and transaction, the traders would request the king to arrange for their safe escort out of his kingdom. The king assured them that there was no need to be afraid because there were no thieves in his realm; if they lost any goods he promised them compensation for the same. He was constantly at war with the Rashtrakutas as well as with the rulers of Takka-Desa (*al-Taqa*) and Chamba (*Jaba*).<sup>55</sup> Marvazi's information on *al-Jurz* is identical to that of Ibn Rusta's.<sup>56</sup>

(iv) *Kingdoms of the North*

*Kashmir (Qashmir)*: There is hardly any valuable material of historical interest in the early Arabic writings on Kashmir. The report of the conquest of Qashmir by some Arab historians of the Middle Ages<sup>57</sup> actually pertained to Panjab and the regions around the Valley and not to the Valley itself. The misunderstanding arises from the use of the term *Qashmir* by the early Arab writers not only for the Valley but also for Punjab and other regions around Kashmir. Again, confusion further multiplies when some later writers used such terms as "Inner and Outer" Qashmir, or "Lower and Upper" Qashmir. Buzurg b. Shahriyar used the latter. The distance between *Lower Qashmir* and al-Mansura (old Brahmanabad, Sind) as given by him is of 70 days by land and 40 (sailing) days by the Indus.† Ibn Rusta uses the term *Inner Qashmir* for the Valley, where the sources of the Ganges lay.<sup>58</sup> Al-Dimashqi divides Qashmir into "l'extérieure et l'intérieure" and says, "Entre la partie extérieure et intérieure de la province de Qashmir, s'étendent des montagnes élevées, parmi lesquelles nous avons les portes de la Chine. . . ."<sup>59</sup> Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari uses the term "Lower Qashmir";<sup>60</sup> al-Biruni specifies the Valley by saying 'in the interior of Kashmir',<sup>61</sup> translated by Sachau as "Inner Kashmir".<sup>62</sup> Al-Idrisi uses both the terms, *Inner* and *Outer* as well as *Upper* and *Lower*.<sup>63</sup> An analysis of the usage of these terms shows that 'Inner Qashmir' meant the Valley of Kashmir and 'Outer Qashmir' the regions to its south,

\*The usual weight of the *dirham* in Islam was 2.97 grammes. The *tatari dirham* was  $1\frac{1}{8}$  or  $1\frac{2}{3}$  of a *dirham*. See S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India* p. 154.

†*'Aja'ib*, pp. 2, 103, 104; Sulayman Nadvi, explains "Kashmir-i-Zirin" as Panjab, see *Arab-o-Hind*, p. 35.

south-east and west and parts of Punjab. Again, 'Upper Qashmir' was used for the Valley, and 'Lower Qashmir' for Punjab.

In al-Ya'qubi's account, Junayd, the governor of Sind, is said to have been accompanied by a certain king *Ashandrabid* on his campaign against Kiraj (Khera, Gujerat). He is reported to have defeated al-Rah (Ray) the king of Kiraj, who escaped. So, Junayd conquered the town. Houtsma suggested the identification of *Ashandrabid* with Chandrapida of Kashmir.<sup>64</sup> But this is very unlikely, for Lalitaditya (723-43), who was the ruler of Kashmir at this time had defeated Junayd,<sup>65</sup> so that there was hardly any possibility of collaboration between them.

The Valley of Kashmir is described as a 'closed country' by Arab travellers and what little information is found on the rulers of Kashmir in Arabic works must have been based on hearsay. Al-Mas'udi calls the king of Kashmir al-Ray (raja) and says that this was the most common title of all the kings of Kashmir. He describes it as a country well protected by lofty mountains on all sides and inaccessible, by men or animals, except from one direction. He describes the Kashmir mountains as one of the wonders of the world.<sup>66</sup> Kashmir, says al-Biruni, was situated on a plateau surrounded by high inaccessible mountains. He remarks that the Kashmiris are particularly "anxious about the natural strength of their country, and therefore take always much care to keep a strong hold upon the entrances and roads leading into it. In consequence it is very difficult to have any commerce with them. In former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly, Jews, but at present they do not allow any Hindu whom they do not know personally to enter, much less other people".<sup>67</sup> According to him the farthest limits reached by the merchants (Muslims) in this region was Rajaori (Rajavari).<sup>68</sup>

Buzurg b. Shahriyar names a king of Kashmir who, according to him, was interested in Islam and had sent for some learned people from Sind to explain to him the teachings of Islam. This king is called by him *Mahrük* son of *Ra'iq*.<sup>\*</sup> Buzurg's work *'Aja'ib al-Hind* was compiled in about A.D. 953 and this was the period when the Utpala dynasty ruled over Kashmir.

\* *'Aja'ib*, pp. 2-4. (Mahru son of Ray).



*Takka-Desa (al-Taqa)*: Another kingdom of the North described by the early Arab writers was *al-Taqa*. This was a small kingdom with a small army, so the king was on peaceful terms with the surrounding kings. But he loved the Arabs just as the *Rashtrakutas* did. The women of the kingdom are described as charming, beautiful and fair-coloured.<sup>69</sup> Ibn Rusta and Marvazi also describe the kingdom as being small, but full of wealth and populous towns. They describe slaves acquired from this kingdom as being very beautiful and handsome.<sup>70</sup> *Al-Taqa* was the kingdom of *Takka-desa* or *Takka-visaya*.\*

*Chamba (Jaba)*: The former hill-state of Chamba (Champa) is referred to by the early Arab writers. *Jaba* is the word used by the Arab writers for the ancient rulers of this state. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih, the ruler enjoyed an honourable position (among the kings of India) and belonged to the Saluqi (Solar) race. The old capital of the kingdom was Brahmapura, but in the time of Sahila Varma, it was transferred to Chamba (according to David Ross, about A.D. 750). The rulers of Chamba, according to Ibn Rusta and Marvazi, took wives only from among themselves, but the *Rashtrakutas* married their ladies. They were always at war with the *Gurjara-Pratiharas* who fought against the *Rashtrakutas* and the rulers of *Takka-desa*. Thus, it seems that in the 10th century, the rulers of Chamba were the allies of the *Rashtrakutas* in the latter's wars against the *Gurjara-Pratiharas*. The Arabs must have obviously favoured the Chamba kings. Again, it was from this kingdom that the Saluqi-hounds (probably 'Nepaul dog') were imported into the Arab world.<sup>71</sup>

#### (v) Kingdoms of the North-East

*The Pala Dynasty*: Some information about the Palas of Bengal is preserved in Arabic literature in the accounts pertaining to the glorious reign of Dharmapala who is usually referred to as *Dharma†* by Arab writers. The frontiers of the Kingdom of this monarch, according to al-Mas'udi, adjoined those of the

\*It was also described by Hsuan-Tsang; its capital lay 8.6 kilometres north of Sialkot (Punjab), see Minorsky, *H.A.*, p. 249; cf. "Takya" is used for *Takka-desa* in *Chachnama (Fathnama-i-Sindh)*, pp. 283, 491, 747.  
 †Sulayman, *Akhbar*, pp. 13-14; also *Dhama, Rahma*, etc. *Dharmapala* ruled from A.D. 769 to 801, and even down to A.D. 815 (Minorsky, *H.A.*, pp. 236-38).

Rashtrakutas of the Deccan on the one side and those of the Gurjara on the other. The king is said to have waged wars against both of them. It was customary for him to enter the battlefield with a force of fifty thousand elephants, but he fought only during the winter season because the elephants could not bear the thirst during other seasons. But Marvazi points out that the king organised "expeditions only in winter lest water be insufficient for their needs, for they use up their rivers to the last drop". His army, according to this author, was huge and well equipped with more than 300,000 men.<sup>72</sup> Al-Mas'udi however remarks that some people exaggerated when they mentioned that the King possessed large armies and that the number of fullers and washermen of his army reached from ten to fifteen thousand.<sup>73</sup> *Dharma*, according to al-Mas'udi, was used as a title by these rulers and was a common name for them. Cowry-shells formed their wealth and were used in commercial transactions. In this kingdom aloes-wood, gold, silver, the hair called *damr*, and the rhinoceros were found. The *damr* fly-whisk fixed in ivory and silver rods was used by the attendant standing behind a King in the assembly. They manufactured the well known muslin cloth. *Dharma's* Kingdom encompassed both land and sea.<sup>74</sup>

Although Dharmapala lived about the time when the first Arab report on Indian Kings was drawn, that is to say the beginning of the 9th century A.D., his reputation and glory is reflected in all the subsequent Arabic reports. Bengal and Assam were continuously visited by the Arab merchants during this period and Sulayman the Merchant, had probably visited the Pala Kingdom. If the report of Buzurg b. Shahriyar (about A.D. 1000) about an Arab sea-captain being painted by one of the Pala Kings be true, then it indicates that the Arabs did seek audience with these Bengali Kings. But about the attitude of these Kings towards the Arabs the reports are silent. In the later periods we find an increasing number of Arab merchants, travellers and Sufis who settled down in Assam and Bengal.

*The Kingdom of Kamarupa:* Kamarupa (*Qamarun* or *Kamru*) was one of the favourite regions of north-east India which the Arabs visited and also described, though not in detail. The region was commercially important for it produced aloes-wood; and the horn of the rhinoceros was in great demand.



However, none of the early rulers of Kamarupa are mentioned by name by the Arab writers. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih, the kings of Kamarupa and the adjoining Kings had split-ears (wore rings), and gold was found in Kamarupa.<sup>75</sup> Giving similar information, Marvazi says that his Kingdom adjoined China. The King had a small army. In his Kingdom gold was found in lumps as big as a man's palm.<sup>76</sup> Sulayman, however, speaks of the ruler of *Lakshmibur* (probably modern Lakhimpur in Assam) whose Kingdom lay inland and had (no access) to the sea. The inhabitants were white with pierced ears and were handsome. Among them there were desert dwellers as well as mountain-dwellers. The Kingdom adjoined that of Dharmapala's.\* The Kings of Kamarupa or Lakhimpur referred to in these early reports may be identified with those of the dynasty of Salambha (or Pralambha) of Kamarupa which ruled from c. A.D. 800 to c. 1000.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Battuta who visited the mountains of Kamarupa describes them as a vast range. The inhabitants, according to him, resembled the Turks (in their features) and possessed great endurance. They were well known for their magical practices. The purpose of Ibn Battuta's visit was to meet the Saint Shaykh Jalal al-Din in the district of Sylhet.†

#### (vi) Kingdoms of the South

The Arabic reports on the rulers of South India are very confusing and present great difficulties in respect of identification of names. There are, first of all, three Kings and a queen described in a group by al-Ya'qubi, I. Rusta, al-Mas'udi and Marvazi.<sup>78</sup> The original report upon which their accounts were based goes back to the middle of the 9th century A.D. and even earlier as suggested by V. Minorsky. He and S. M. H. Nainar have identified the Arabic names of these rulers with the Pandya, the Cera Kings and the Pallavas, and with a queen of Uraga-pattanam, south of Trichur (Cochin).<sup>79</sup>

*The Pandya dynasty:* Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ishaq who drew the report on the kings of the South claimed to have

\*Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 14. Sauvaget identifies *Lakshmibur* with 'Cakhimpur' of modern maps, *ibid.*, page 54, note 29/1.

†H.A.R. Gibb, *Travels*, p. 268. It was established by Yule that the district visited by Ibn Battuta was Sylhet where the tomb of Shaykh Jalal al-Din is still venerated (Gibb, *ibid.*, Notes, p. 366, note 9).

had an audience with the Pandya King (*al-Abidi*, in Ibn Rusta). But in his kingdom, he says, there were no elephants; so he purchased them from others and bought only those that were more than five cubits in height and for every cubit exceeding five, he paid a thousand *dinars*.<sup>80</sup> From al-Mas'udi we learn that the Pandya King ruled at *Mandurfin* (Madura), and had some political relations with the Kings of Ceylon and China, the details of which, he says, he gave in his earlier works, *Kitab Akhbar al-Zaman* and *al-Ausat*.\*

The Kingdom of Pandya is called by Marvazi *R.tyla*, and by al-Ya'qubi, *al-Debal†*. The Pandya dynasty ruled in the south-easternmost parts India (to the South of the Kaveri).<sup>81</sup>

The *Cera King (al-Saylaman)* is described by Ibn Rusta and Marvazi as the most powerful King of the South. He had a large army consisting of 70,000 men and a few elephants. He had the reputation of being the most courageous King of India.<sup>82</sup>

The *Pallavas (Qaruti)*, probably the Arabic form of *Kaduvetti*, a well known title of the Pallava family). He is described as being in the neighbourhood of the Pandya. They followed the King of *al-Saylaman (Ceramam)*.<sup>83</sup>

The *Queen of Uragam*: A queen by the name of *al-Rabiya* (*Raniya?*) is also mentioned by these writers. She ruled in a country called *Urf-sin* in the region of *al-Aghbab*. In a place in her Kingdom called *Buraz* were found elephants up to the height of 10-11 cubits.<sup>84</sup> Her Kingdom may have existed on the Mandam peninsula or in Cochin and the town *Buraz* has been identified with Pollachi. In the opinion of Minorsky the existence of a queen is plausible because the ancient rule of matriarchy still persisted, and "the early Arab source hinted at some vassal state on the territory of the nascent but not fully restored Colas, for our source definitely refers to the period of the Cera supremacy."\*\*

\**M.M.C.V.*, pp. 111-112. Both these voluminous works of al-Mas'udi on world history do not seem to be extant. The manuscripts or printed works bearing these titles are not by him. Similarly, manuscripts bearing titles like 'Marvels of the world' are wrongly ascribed to al-Mas'udi (See S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, pp. 15-17).

†This name may stand for Devapala.

\*\*V. Minorsky has identified *Urf.sin/Ursh.fin* on the Mandam peninsula forming the southernmost protuberance of India. Dr. Barnett suggested to him the identification of the name with Uragham/Uragam,



B. THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

*Mahmud of Ghazna*: Ibn al-Athir (1160-1234) presents some important and reliable information on the life and campaign of Mahmud of Ghazna in India. According to this historian, Mahmud defeated Jayapala in A.H. 392 (A.D. 1001-1002) and released him after accepting a ransom. If a Hindu King, he says, was once captured by a Muslim, he forfeited his right of ruling over his subjects. So, after his defeat Jayapala shaved his head and committed suicide by burning himself to death. Jayapala's valuable necklace studded with precious stones and priced at two lakh *dinars* in the open market was carried off by Mahmud. The same year Mahmud conquered Vayhand.\* In A. H. 396 (A.D. 1005-1006), *Yamin al-Daula* (Mahmud) conquered Multan from its governor Abu 'l-Fath and about the same time he defeated *Andabal* (Anandapala).† He then attacked the fort of Gwalior and defeated its master Bayda.\*\* He also attacked the fort of Kalinjar, but as there was some disturbance in Khurasan he returned there after making peace with the Indian King.††

He returned to India once again in A.H. 397 (A.D. 1006/1007) to punish Nawasa Shah who had returned a renegade after having accepted Islam at the hands of Mahmud.<sup>85</sup>

Mahmud invaded India again in A.H. 398 (A.D. 1007-1008)

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(or possibly Uraga-Pattanam), which lies to the south of Trichur (Cochin), and suggested the identification of *Buraz* with Pollachi taluq and its headquarters town in the Coimbatore district. (Minorsky, *Marvazi*, Commentary, pp. 145-146).

\*Ibn al-Athir, Vol. IX, 59; Vayhand is Ohind (Udabhandapur). The above facts given by Ibn al-Athir are corroborated by other sources. See *A.A.H.I.*, p. 183; Mohammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin*, pp. 23-24.

†Abu 'l-Fath Da'ud belonged to the Qaramita (a Shi'a sect) of Sind. He ruled upper Sind. Mahmud defeated him and also Anandapala, son of Jayapala in A.D. 1005-1006 (Mohammad Habib, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26).

\*\*Ibn al-Athir seems to have confused this name with Bhera, a town on the west bank of the Jhelum, under the Salt range. Biji Rai of Bhera was defeated by Mahmud in A.D. 1006 (Mohammad Habib, *op. cit.* pp. 24-25).

††Ibn al-Athir, vol. IX, pp. 64-65. Mahmud received the submission of Gwalior and Kalinjar in A.D. 1022-23 (Mohammad Habib, *op. cit.*, p. 183).

and fought a battle with *Abrahmanbal* (Brahmanapala), son of *Andabal* (Anandapala), on the banks of the *Hindmand* (Hel-mund) Brahmanapala suffered a heavy defeat and escaped to the fort of Bhimnagar.\* This fort, according to our historian, had many idols and much wealth. Mahmud seized the fort and acquired 90 lakh *dirhams* and vessels of gold and silver weighing seven lakh and four hundred maunds. Besides, there was a chamber in the fort, of the size of 30 x 10 cubits, full of silver, which Mahmud carried away to Ghazna. He made a display of the entire booty in the courtyard of his palace in Ghazna in the presence of foreign envoys and dignitaries.†

According to Ibn al-Athir, Mahmud carried on at least seven invasions against India between A.H. 400 (A.D. 1009-1010) and A.H. 414 (A.D. 1023) including those of Thanesar, Kashmir and Kanauj.\*\*

In A.H. 416 (A.D. 1025-1026) Mahmud invaded Somnath which according to Ibn al-Athir was visited by about one lakh Hindu pilgrims on the day of the eclipse of the Moon. He says that in accordance with *tanasukh* (transmigration of the soul), it was believed that every soul, after its separation from the body, returned to this temple. This temple had 10,000 villages as religious endowments and had large quantities of precious goods. The idol was given a bath with the holy waters of the Ganges, brought to Somnath everyday from a distance of 200 *farsakhs* (600 Ar. mls.). Mahmud carried away much wealth from this temple.<sup>86</sup>

Mahmud is described by the historian as a comely and handsome man with small eyes and reddish-golden hair. He was wise, learned and religious and was kind to his subjects. He patronized and honoured the learned and always fought for Islam.

\*In 1008, Mahmud "routed the troops of Anandapala, led by prince Brahmanapala, at the battle of Waihand, and pursued the fugitives as far as Bhimnagar" (*A.A.H.I.*, p. 183).

†Ibn al-Athir, Vol. IX, p. 71. This fort was probably the temple of Nagarkot (Kangra), known as the fort of Bhim, situated on the top of a hill on the upper Bias. The temple contained immense wealth (See Mohammad Habib, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32).

\*\*Ibn al-Athir, Vol. IX, pp. 73, 83-85, 89, 91-92, 106-107, 115. Mahmud took Thanesar in A.D. 1014, and in the following years made an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the vale of Kashmir. . . . In 1018 he sacked Kanauj and extinguished the once powerful empire of the Pratihara (*A.A.H.I.*, p. 183).



But he aimed at accumulating wealth from every possible source.<sup>87</sup>

*Shihab al-Din Ghori*: The Arab historians Ibn al-Athir, Ibn Khaldun, Abu 'l-Fida and Ibn Kathir describe briefly Shihab al-Din Ghori's first invasion of India in A.H. 547 (A.D. 1152), his capture of Lahore in A.H. (A.D. 1183) and his attack on Agra.<sup>88</sup> When Shihab al-Din's attacks became frequent and serious, the Hindu rulers of India decided to form a confederation to attack him with a unified force. So, soldiers were recruited to the army in large numbers and a queen who was the greatest and the most powerful among them was elected the commander (of the combined forces). When Shihab al-Din came to know of these preparations, he marched against them and a fierce battle took place between the two forces. Shihab al-Din was injured but he was saved by his slaves under the cover of darkness and was carried to Agra. When his brother Ghayath al-Din came to know of the fate of his brother he marched out with a large army to defend his brother.\*

In A.H. 583 (A.D. 1187-1188) Shihab al-Din attacked Ajmer but he was defeated. In a second attempt however he conquered it.<sup>89</sup>

In A.H. 590 (A.D. 1193-1194) he attacked Banaras and defeated the combined armies of the Raja of Banaras and other minor rajas. Shihab al-Din entered Banaras triumphantly and carried away his booty to Ghazna on 1400 camels. In A.H. 592 (A.D. 1195-1196) he attacked the fort of Bhankar and then the fort of Gwalior.

In A.H. 597 (A.D. 1200-1201) he asked his lieutenant Qutb al-Din to conquer Nahrwala (Patan, Gujerat). He fought a battle against the Hindu *rajas* and defeated them but finding that he was unable to maintain control there, returned the fort to the *raja* after receiving a tribute from him.†

\*This refers to the battle fought by Prithviraj and other Rajput princes against Muhammad of Ghur at Tarain near Thanesar in A.D. 1191 in which Muhammad was defeated and retired to Ghaznin. But in 1192 Muhammad again invaded India and defeated Prithviraj at the same place. Prithviraj was captured and put to death (A.A.H.I., p. 278).

†Ibn al-Athir, Vol. XII, p. 66. In 1194, Qutb al-Din Aibak, the trusted lieutenant of Muhammad of Ghur "helped his master in defeating and slaying Jaichand, raja of Benares and Kanauj, at Chandwar on the

*The Tughluqs:* Ibn Battuta describes in great detail the reign of Muhammad b. Tughluq. The traveller was highly impressed by the hospitality shown to him by the Sultan. Muhammad Tughluq, the King of India, he says, honoured and respected foreigners. He loved them and bestowed upon them high posts. Many of his nobles, chamberlains, ministers, judges and sons-in-law were foreigners. He had ordered that the foreigners be addressed as *aziz* (dear one). This Moroccan traveller describes very vividly the city of Delhi which he saw as a magnanimous town with beautiful and solid buildings and a city-wall matchless in the world. In his opinion, throughout the East, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, there was no town comparable to this city in its size and population. Delhi constituted four towns: (1) *Delhi*, the ancient Hindu town; (2) *Siri*; (3) *Tughluq Abad*, built by Ghayas al-Din Tughluq and named after him; (4) lastly, *Jahan Panah*, built by Sultan Muhammad Shah Tughluq. It had a magnificent city-wall and twenty-eight gates. The king resided in this town.<sup>90</sup>

Ibn Battuta was a great admirer of the Sultan. We find in his work a graphic description of the royal palace and interesting details pertaining to his government.<sup>91</sup> Ibn Battuta also praised the Sultan for his great regard for justice. Once a Hindu filed a suit in the court against the King alleging that the latter had killed his brother without any reason. So, the king walked up to the court on foot and appeared unarmed before the judge (*qadi*) whom he had ordered in advance not to rise on his entry. The judge asked the King to come to an agreement with the plaintiff or suffer due punishment. So the King made a compromise with the plaintiff.

The eye-witness account of Ibn Battuta pertaining to Delhi and its ruler Muhammad b. Tughluq forms an important and authentic source for the history of the Tughluq period. Mahdi Husain has utilized his account and the accounts of the contemporary Arab travellers who visited Delhi as evidence to show that Delhi was *not* destroyed by Muhammad b. Tughluq as is generally believed, but that he intended to establish another capi-

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Jumna in the Etawah district. In 1197 he chastised Bhimdev II of Gujerat for his having caused him some trouble, plundered his capital and returned to Delhi by way of Hansi" (See *A.A.H.I.*, pp. 278-79).



tal in Deogir for various reasons while still preserving the old capital of Delhi.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to the valuable material on the Sultanate period briefly presented above, the Arabic works contain accounts of many other dynasties and rulers of the later periods, e.g. the Muslim Kings of Gujerat, various Kingdoms of the South and the Mughals. Of the important writers of the later period we may mention Hajji Dabir, author of *Zafar al Walih bi-Muzaffar wa Alih*, a history of Gujerat; Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-Aydrarus, author of *al-Nur al-Safir 'an Akhbar al-Qarn al-'Ashir* dealing with biographies and other events of 16th-17th century; al-Hasan b. Ali b. Shadqam, author of *Zahr al-Riyad wa Zulal al-Hiyad*; al-Sakhawi, author of *Dau al-Lami' fi 'l-Qarn al-Tasi'*. Besides, there are many other Arabic works which contain important source-material on the political history of India of the later middle ages and throw important light on the life and conditions of the Indian people.

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10. See above: 'India's Wisdom and Sagacity'.
11. *Muruj*, I, pp. 148-160; tr. by S. Maqbul Ahmad, quoted from *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 99-100; cf. al-Ya'qubi, *op. cit.*, I, p. 92.
12. *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 101-102.
13. On *Pitamaha* see *A.I.*, I, pp. 178, 361.
14. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 102.
15. *The Upanishads*, tr. by F. Max Muller, Part II, New York 1952, Introduction, p. xxxix.
16. *A. I.*, I, p. 153.
17. *A. I.*, I, pp. 368-369.



18. Al-Ya'qubi, I, p. 96. There are other readings of *Zarih*, namely, *Razuh* and *Azraj*, and of *Rahba'am*, variants are *Rah'am* and *Abya b. Rahba'am* (see *ibid*).
19. *Muruj*, II, pp. 79, 87-88.
20. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 102. Could we identify *al-Bahbud* with Mahapadma of the Nanda dynasty whose rule according to the Puranas lasted for a century? (See *A. A. H. I.*, pp. 62-63.)
21. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 102.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 102, note (3).
23. See Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
24. Al-Mas'udi, *al-Tanbih*, p. 56; al-Ya'qubi, I, pp. 96-97. See *M.M.C.V.*, p. 103, Note 1.
25. Al-Ya'qubi, pp. 97-99; *M.M.C.V.*, p. 103.
26. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 103, note (2).
27. Variant: *Korash*, al-Ya'qubi, I. p. 105.
28. Al-Ya'qubi, I, pp. 99-100.
29. *Ibid.*, I, 102-105.
30. See Minorsky, *Marvazi*, Commentary, pp. 142-143; Reports on Indian Kings of this period are given Ibn Khurradadhbih, see pp. 16, 66-68; Sulayman, *Akhbar*, pp. 11-14; al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, I, pp. 162, 177-78, 372-76, 382-94, etc.; al-Ya'qubi, I, p. 106; *Ibid.*, II, pp. 379-80; Ibn Rusta, pp. 133-5; al-Idrisi, *India*, pp. 36, 57, 59-60, and others.
31. See my article 'Balhara', *E.I.*, (new Edition), vol. I.
32. S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, p. 139.
33. Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 12.
34. *Akhbar*, p. 12.
35. Quoted from *M.M.C.V.*, p. 106, tr. by S. Maqbul Ahmad.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 105; Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 12.
38. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 107 and 108, note (1).
39. *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 105-106 and note (2)
40. Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 12.
41. K. M. Munshi, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
43. *Ibid.*
44. R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datt, *An Advanced History of India*, London 1961, p. 182.
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46. *A.A.H.I.*, p. 182.
47. See my Commentary, *India*, pp. 136-137.
48. S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Travels of Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas'udi", *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Vol. XXVIII, 4, p. 523.
49. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 110.
50. *Muruj*, pp. 162, 178, 207, 372, 374-75; quoted from *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 108-109.
51. See Idrisi, *India*, pp. 64-65.
52. H. C. Ray, quoted from *India*, p. 144.
53. *A.A.H.I.*, p. 171.

54. Idrisi, *India*, p. 143.
55. 'Ibn Rusta's Account of India', *op. cit.*, p. 52.
56. *Marvazi*, p. 47.
57. Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, ed. Abd. Allah Anis al-Tabba and 'Umar Anis al-Tabba, Beirut, 1958, p. 624.
58. I. Rusta, p. 39.
59. *Nukhbat al-Dahr fi 'Aja'ib al-Barr wa'l-Bahr*, *Manuel de la Cosmographie du moyen age*, tr. by M.A.F. Mehren, Copenhagen, 1874, p. 246.
60. *Masalik al-Absar*, Part I, Ar. Text, ed. by Ahmad Zaki Pasha, Cairo, 1924, p. 84.
61. *Alberuni's India* (Ar. Text), p. 56.
62. *A.I.*, I, p. 117.
63. Idrisi, *India*, pp. 9, 58, 64, 65.
64. Al-Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikh*, II, pp. 379-80 and note (f).
65. Mohibbul Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
66. *Muruj*, I, pp. 177, 373.
67. *A.I.*, I, p. 206.
68. *A.I.*, I, p. 208; *ibid.*, Sachau, *Annotations*, II, p. 320.
69. Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 13, cf. al-Mas'udi, *M.M.C.V.*, p. 110.
70. 'Ibn Rusta's Account of India', pp. 51-52; cf. *Marvazi*, p. 47.
71. See my article 'Djaba', *E.I.*, Vol. II (new edition).
72. *Marvazi*, p. 47.
73. *M.M.C.V.*, p. 111.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 111. Cf. *Marvazi*, pp. 47-48; Sulayman, *Akhbar*, p. 13.
75. I. Khur., pp. 67-68.
76. *Marvazi*, p. 48.
77. S. Maqbul Ahmad, Idrisi, *India*, p. 142.
78. Al-Ya'qubi, I, p. 106; I. Rusta, p. 133; al-Mas'udi, *M.M.C.V.*, pp. 111-112; *Marvazi*, pp. 46-47.
79. See Minorsky, *Marvazi*, Commentary, pp. 143-146.
80. 'Ibn Rusta's Account of India', *op. cit.*, p. 50.
81. Minorsky, *Marvazi*, Commentary, p. 144.
82. I. Rusta, pp. 133-134; *Marvazi*, pp. 46-47.
83. I. Rusta, p. 133; *Marvazi*, pp. 46, 144.
84. I. Rusta, p. 134; *Marvazi*, p. 47; cf. *H.A.*, Paras 10 & 12.
85. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. IX, p. 66.
86. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. IX, pp. 118-119. Cf. Mohammad Habib, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-57.
87. Ibn al-Athir, pp. 118-119.
88. Ibn al-Athir, *op. cit.*, XI, pp. 63, 65; Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-'Ibar*, vol. IV, p. 853 *et seq.*; Abu 'l-Fida, I, pp. 25-27; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa 'l-Nihaya*, XII, p. 23. Cf. *A.A.H.I.*, pp. 277-78.
89. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. XII, p. 41; Ibn Khaldun, Vol. IV, pp. 859-60.
90. Ibn Battuta, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 16 (ed. Cairo).
91. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 32-33, 40.
92. (Agha) Mahdi Husain, Tughluq Dynasty, Calcutta 1963, pp. 144-175.



## EPILOGUE

THE ANALYSIS of Indo-Arab relations in the foregoing chapters shows that the Indians and the Arabs had, in history, influenced each other deeply in various spheres of life—social, cultural and intellectual, and as a result certain images of one were projected on the other. The mediaeval Arab image of India was one of respect and deep regard for Indian philosophy, sciences and arts, for the intelligence, sagacity and wisdom of the people and for their valuable contribution to the progress of human civilization. On the other hand, mediaeval religious sects, denominations and social divisions (castes) were considered unworthy of the people. The Arabs and their civilization created a healthy image of broad-mindedness, religious tolerance and justice. India was particularly impressed, and indeed benefited, by the Arabic sciences and learning which flourished from the eighth to the twelfth centuries A.D., and probably the impact was as great as that made by the Arabs on Mediaeval Europe. In the field of politics, except for the Arab campaigns in north-western India in the early period of Islamic history, and their short-lived rule, relations generally remained cordial and peaceful. The Arab settlers in India were given complete religious and administrative freedom and authority by some Indian rulers. Arab merchants visiting south India and the coastal regions were most cordially welcomed and given facilities for trade and worship.

As for the modern period, the available data and material pertaining to the last one and a half centuries is so vast and varied that it requires a special study, and for this reason it has largely been excluded from the scope of the present volume. Anyone who wishes to examine the different aspects of Indo-Arab relations during this period has to consider the socio-political background and the true spirit of the age. Throughout this period, the Arabs had to combat two evils: on the one hand, they were faced with the challenge of political enslavement by the West, and had to resist the aggressions of the French, the British and other European

Powers, and on the other hand, there was the challenge that existed within the decadent Islamic society, namely, the social and intellectual backwardness of the people, the appalling poverty of the masses and the twin evils of traditionalism and dogmatism. It was fully realized by the politicians and the social and religious reformers alike that the two challenges were closely interlinked, and it was not possible to meet one without the other. No doubt, therefore, leaders of this period like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), Orabi Pasha, al-Kawakibi (d. 1904), Mustafa Kamil (d. 1908), Shakib Arsalan, Rashid Rida (d. 1935) and others combined the qualities of political leadership and reformist acumen. For the Arab society as a whole, it was a period of transformation from mediaevalism to modernism, and from intellectual backwardness to rejuvenation and renaissance.

The situation in India was not very different. The broad features of the Indian society resembled those of the contemporary Arab society. By the middle of the nineteenth century, India had come under complete political domination of the British. Besides, deep social and religious evils, dogmatism and traditionalism, had enslaved the people, and intellectually and educationally, they were very much behind contemporary Europe. However, the leaders were fully conscious of the causes that kept the society backward, and hence some of the greatest socio-religious reformist movements of history were launched during this period.

The first half of the present century was the period of the growth of mass political consciousness both in the Arab world and in India. It developed and gained momentum gradually as a result of the people's bitter experiences of foreign rule. For the Arabs, the First World War was a bad experience, for, while on the one hand, the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and the Ottoman rule over the Arab provinces came to an end, on the other, the foreign rule of the British and the French enslaved them in the form of the Mandates. It was during the intervening period between the First and Second World Wars that Arab political consciousness truly developed, nationalist parties came into being and massive struggles for independence were launched. Roughly during the same period, Indian political movements also forged ahead and political parties became truly representative of the people. It is obvious that the main concern of the Indians and the Arabs during



this period was political independence. Politics was no more confined to the few rulers or political leaders as in the past. The masses were involved in it with the full consciousness that freedom was the primary task of their life and that it was the pre-requisite for all progress and prosperity. During this period, we come across many examples of Indo-Arab political contacts. Even though direct contacts between the Indian and the Arab leaders were not always possible because of the restrictions imposed on their movements by the authorities, meetings and exchanges of experiences did take place, messages of sympathy, unity and solidarity were exchanged. This happened both on an individual and a collective level. Mahatma Gandhi highly respected Sa'd Zaghlol Pasha and sympathized with the Arabs on the Palestine question. Similarly, the Indian Muslims' Union in London paid tributes to Mustafa Kamil after the Danshawy incident. In India, the Muslims supported the Arabs on the Palestine question.

A new phase of India's relations with the Arab world began with the dawn of independence about the middle of the present century. Both in India and the Arab countries which have achieved full independence, political freedom has preceded social and economic progress, and hence, the complexity of the situation. The nature of the problems, especially political and economic, that the two peoples have been facing during the last two decades, is quite different from those of the preceding half a century or so. They have now been faced with questions like the maintenance of political freedom, world peace, disarmament and nuclear weapons, and so on. In the spheres of economic growth and development, practically all the Arab States of North Africa and West Asia, have been facing problems that are identical with those faced by India, in other words, the problems of a developing nation.

It is significant that during the last two decades, India and many of the Arab States have forged a common political understanding and a similar outlook in the international political arena. Thanks to the foresighted policies of Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, V. K. Krishna Menon and Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Arab leaders like Gamal 'Abd El-Nasser, the Indians and the Arabs along with other non-aligned nations have taken a common stand in the U.N. on many an important international question. Again, it was due to this common understanding and these common policies that the U.A.R. supported India on the question of Goa and

India supported the U.A.R. in the Suez Crisis of 1956. India's stand on the Israeli aggression against the U.A.R., Jordan and other Arab States in 1967, is but a manifestation of the continuation of the same policy as was followed by Jawaharlal Nehru. India's commercial interest in the Arab world probably constitutes one of the reasons for her political support of the Arabs in their times of crisis. It is not the main or the only reason. To my mind, it is the common objective, namely, the maintenance of world peace at any cost, and the immense social and economic problems that the developing nations are facing today that compel the Indians and the Arabs to forge a common platform on national and international matters. Again, since India, the U.A.R. and some other Arab States have consistently followed a policy of non-alignment, they are obliged to follow a common policy on a number of other matters as well.

Finally, a word about cultural relations. In my opinion, this aspect of Indo-Arab relations has been the weakest during the last two decades. During my tour of the U.A.R., Lebanon, Syria and Iraq in 1964, I discovered that, in spite of the love and regard that the Arabs display towards India, very little is actually known by them about modern India. Apart from Rabindranath Tagore, hardly any Indian is known in the fields of art and literature. Writers like Tawfiq al-Hakim and Najib Mahfuz are full of admiration and praise for the poet, just as Taha Husain is full of admiration for Jawaharlal Nehru. But hardly anyone has heard of our Hindi or Urdu men of letters or writers in other languages. The same is true of India. We are acquainted with but a few names of modern Arab writers. Perhaps the most known are Taha Husain and Jibran Khalil Jibran. We know little or nothing about the life and works of modern Arab writers like Tawfiq al-Hakim, Mahmud Taymur, al-'Aqqad, Najib Mahfuz, Salah al-Asir or Yusuf Izzeddin. These are some of the intellectuals who through their writings are exercising a deep influence on the life of the Arabs today. It is the same with art, music and other fields of work. To my mind the main reason for this gulf is that no concerted effort has yet been made by either the Arabs or the Indians to present the writings and works of these people to each other through translations or other means. There is, however, a great desire on the part of both to learn more about each other. Although many a cultural agreement between various Arab



governments and India has been signed, a concerted effort needs to be made in this direction also.

Today, there is closer collaboration between India and many of the Arab States in the educational and technical fields. There are a number of Indian teachers, students and technicians in many of the Arab countries like the U.A.R., Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait, etc. Likewise, a number of Arab students are studying in Indian universities. This in itself is a sign of the growing desire for academic and technical collaboration. The Arab world is a vast area stretching from Morocco in the West to Iraq in the East. We in India know very little about countries like Morocco, Tunis, Algeria or Libya, in spite of the fact that many of the social and economic problems that these countries are facing today are similar to ours. It is, therefore, as much necessary for us to learn how they are solving their problems as for them to know how we are solving ours. The obvious means to do so is to have as much cultural exchange as possible, to render modern Arabic works on various aspects of Arab life into Hindi and other Indian languages and to render Indian works and writings into Arabic. It is only in this manner that we can project India's heritage and modern Indian culture on the Arab world and they can project theirs on us.

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DR. MAQBUL AHMAD (b. 1919) is Professor of West Asian Studies and Director, Centre of West Asian Studies at Aligarh Muslim University. After post-graduation from the University of Bombay he went to Oxford for higher studies in 1945, and did research work on Arab historical geography and Arabic accounts relating to India. He obtained D.Phil from Oxford University in 1950. Since his return to India in 1951 he has been teaching in Aligarh Muslim University. For some time he was Professor of West Asian Studies in the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla. While in England he was actively connected with India League. He is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London, and a Member of the Egyptian Geographical Society and the German Oriental Society. He has travelled widely in Europe and the Middle East. He is the author of *Islamic Culture*, 1953, *India and the Neighbouring Territories* by al-Sharif al-Idrisi (Arabic Text), 1954, *Al-Mas'udi Millenary Commemoration Volume*, 1960, *al-Sharif al-Idrisi, India and the Neighbouring Territories*, 1960, *Introduction to Arabic Geographical Literature and Arabic Accounts on India (8th-10th centuries A.D.)*. He has contributed articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, published from Leiden.

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